

“As if we were in a coma and have just awakened”

Post-colonial critique and the so-called “Arab Spring”

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Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tutkii niin kutsuttuun ”arabikevääseen” kohdistettuja post-koloniaalisen tutkimuksen kritiikkejä. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan millaisia muotoja post-koloniaalinen kritiikki saa ja miten sitä on hyödynnetty tarkasteltaessa niin kutsutun ”arabikevään” narratiiveja ja representaatioita. Erityisesti tarkastellaan sitä, miten kritiikkiä voidaan käyttää tulevaisuudessa tutkimuksen työkaluna ja miten sen avulla päästään syvempään ymmärrykseen niin kutsutun ”arabikevään” kaltaisista paikallisista ja globaaleista yhteiskunnallisista muutoksista.

Tutkielma esittelee ensin katsauksen post-koloniaaliseen teoriaan keskittyen erityisesti orientalismin ja eurokeskeisyyden käsitteisiin. Ensisijaisena lähteenä toimii postkolonialistiseen teoriaan pohjaava kriittinen tutkimus. Tätä tutkimusta esitellään tutkielmassa laajasti. Lisäksi kriittistä tutkimusta tarkastellaan laadullisen sisältöanalyysin menetelmin.

Tutkielmassa tarkastelluista teksteistä nousee esille, että länsimaisessa kerronnassa vallalla ovat eurosentriset käsitykset ja ideaalit sekä orientalistiset stereotypiat ja yksinkertaistukset. Nämä liittyvät eurosentriseen ideaaliin modernista. Keskeinen teema onkin länsimaalaisen kerronnan luoma valheellinen käsitys universaalista, joka tuotetaan jättämällä huomiotta ei-länsimaista lähtöisin oleva tutkimus ja kritiikki.

Tutkielman keskeinen johtopäätös on, että kolonialismin tuottamien valtarakenteiden purkaminen valheellisen universaalien käsitteiden purkamisen kautta on keskeistä, jos halutaan saavuttaa oikeudenmukainen globaali maailma. Tämän dekolonisaation prosessin keskiössä on niiden alistettujen ääni ja kritiikki, joita tällä hetkellä marginalisoidaan lännen toimesta. Nämä globaalin etelän äänet ja kritiikit tulee tunnistaa ja niitä tulee kuunnella.

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

This Master’s thesis examines the critiques coming from the post-colonial studies that have been produced on the narration of the so-called “Arab Spring”. The thesis analyzes at what kind of shapes and forms the post-colonial theory takes and how it has been utilized to critique the western narration and representations of the so-called “Arab Spring”. Especially, the thesis considers how these critiques can be utilized in future research and how they produce a deeper understanding of global transformations such as the so-called “Arab Spring”.

The thesis presents an analysis of post-colonial theory, focusing mainly on the concepts of “orientalism” and “eurocentrism”. The post-colonial tradition is the main theoretical basis of the critiques used as the main source and analyzed in the thesis. These critiques are presented in large scale in the thesis. The texts are studies using qualitative method of content analysis.

The critiques presented in the thesis clearly show that Eurocentric views and ideals as well as orientalist stereotypes and simplifications are hegemonic in the western narrative. These connect to the Eurocentric ideal of modernity. Central argument found in the critiques analyzed in the thesis is that the western grand narrative creates a false ideal of universalism that is produced by neglecting the subaltern voices and critiques.

The key finding of the thesis is that at the center of breaking this grand narrative is dismantling the power structures produced by the colonialism through dismantling the false ideal of universalism if we want to achieve a globally just world. At the center of this process of decolonization are the subaltern voices and critiques that are currently pushed to the margins by “the West”. These voices and critiques coming from the Global South need to be recognized and listened to.

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orientalism, eurocentrism, post-colonialism, Arab Spring

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# 1. Introduction

*One of the biggest frustrations for me is that people are dubbing the Arab uprisings the "Arab Awakening" or the "Arab Spring," as if we were in a coma and have just awakened or were frozen and now are defrosting! The fact that there was a decade of mobilization that started with the second Palestinian intifada when we saw street protests for the first time since the 1970s, followed by mobilization against the war in Iraq, and then a labor movement in which more than 1.8 million people have been involved in contentious action is overlooked to paint an image of youth discovering Facebook and going out to call for a US-style democracy. (Abu-Lughod & El-Mahdi, 2011, p. 690.)<sup>1</sup>*

This thesis hopes to highlight the post-colonial thought and critique presented to the narratives on the so-called “Arab Spring” (I will get to the problems of naming the events later on in this thesis). These critiques, as the quote below shows, are focused on the two pillars of eurocentrism and orientalism. Eurocentrism here means that West is seen as universal and epicenter of the development. Orientalism is the theoretical framework for the othering i.e. casting the division between “them” and “us”, meaning the Arab world and the West. (Said, 1978) In the narration (at least in the beginning), this was also seen as something that was changing, not that the notion that the “them” in the Arab World were becoming more like “us” (*in the West*) is any less Eurocentric. In this thesis, I aim to show different ways in which the post-colonial thought has been used to highlight the flaws in the “grand narrative”.

*As such in the new grand narrative of “Arab Awakening” both academics and the media (international and local) are appropriating, interpreting, and representing the recent events along the same pillars of othering and, romanticization, while casting universalist-Eurocentric judgments. In the case of Egypt, the recent uprising is constructed as a youth, non-violent*

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<sup>1</sup> The quote used here and as a title of the thesis is an quotation from Rahab El-Mahdi in a talk with Lila Abu-Lughod on Lila Abu-Lughod & Rabab El-Mahdi (2011), “Beyond the “Woman Question” in the Egyptian Revolution”

*revolution in which social media (especially facebook and twitter) are champions. The underlying message here is that it these “middle-class” educated youth (read: modern) are not “terrorists,” they hold the same values as “us” (the democratic West), and finally use the same tools (facebook and twitter) that “we” invented and use in our daily-lives. They are just like “us” and hence they deserve celebration. (El-Mahdi, 2011.)*

The events of the so-called “Arab Spring” are a great example of how the Eurocentric worldview flaws the representations and narrations of events. The so-called “Arab Spring” happened within multiple societies and for many different reasons. While there are some factors that may unite them, they are still in many ways’ separate events within wide array of societies. If we look at for example Egypt and compare it for example to Bahrain or Yemen, we can clearly see that the society is completely different, the influence by foreign countries was different and the political structures are different. The complexity of these events cannot be fully comprehended if we only look at them from the Eurocentric perspective of the grand narrative. One more example is how the events came to be called the Arab Spring in the West and how the naming leaves out different aspects and groups that are important part, such as the struggle for independence of the Kurds and construction of an alternative for the neoliberal hegemony in Rojava or the Sahrawi peoples struggle for independence in Morocco.

Essentially, this thesis is about representations and unequal power-relations that have been generated, as I see, by the imperial and colonial history and rule of the West. While colonial rule and colonialism might have ended, the coloniality and its effects are still relevant in analyzing the representations and understanding the power relations in building them. By highlighting certain concepts stemming from post-colonial studies, I aim to show that there are certain aspects and voices that are pushed to the margins. Many of the critiques follow on the footsteps of Edward Said’s construction of Orientalism (1978) and Samir Amin’s work on pointing out Eurocentrism (1989). What is important for me to point out is that the so-called Arab Spring, shows that the subaltern is speaking, and it is speaking loudly. And more importantly they are no longer, if they ever were waiting to be recognized by the West (Dabashi, 2012, p. 77). For me in order to move forward towards decolonial world and more intersectional research and solidarity, these voices must be recognized in the West and put into the center of research. We cannot

understand the world by dividing it into “the West and the Rest” and from the viewpoint of the West by the West for western audiences.

### **1.1 Aim of the thesis, theoretical background and methods**

The thesis focuses on the use the post-colonial thought as a tool to both understand the concepts it employs and the critique it places on the way we narrate and use language when talking of certain issues. This thesis focuses on the use of the fore mentioned in the narration of the so-called “Arab Spring” as it serves as an interesting case, which has received a lot of attention and critique. The aim is to see how the post-colonial thought is used in construction of the critique and what it tells us. Secondly, stemming from this the thesis uses this as a tool to see how the post-colonial thought can be used as a tool for getting over the issues it raises and in the future.

The research question is *How and what kind of post-colonial thinking and critique has been used in the discussion of the so-called Arab Spring?* Using this as a basis for the research it will additionally try to look at *What kind of tools the post-colonial critique provides for future in terms of analyzing social movements in the MENA region and globally?*

#### **1.1.1 Post-colonial thought**

Post-colonial thought is based on the historical subordination of the West that has produced an imbalanced power relation that continues to this day. The word “post-colonial” can be seen as “continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges throughout... diverse range of societies”. The use of post-coloniality has grown and is being employed by a wide range of issues and disciplines. The basic themes of the thought still remain relevant today. (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006, p. 1-9.) The post-colonial thought in this thesis serves to highlight the important distinction that is created by the imposed power relation that is based on the historical divide.



Using the post-colonial thought as a basis for the thesis I am focusing on certain key concepts that derive from that tradition. First, a concept that closely relates to the analysis and critique of the so-called “Arab Spring” is the concept of Orientalism. A concept coined by Edward Said (1978), describes the academic field of studying the Orient and the simplifications made in that. The term has been used and developed by other academics but essentially it is still focused on the simplifications and assumptions that are based on the power relation caused by the hegemony of the West. Within the concept the divisions it causes are important still today through the formulation of the division to them and us, meaning the othering of those who are not seen as Western.

Closely related to the Orientalism is the concept of Eurocentrism first formulated by Samir Amin (1989). Eurocentrism highlights the hegemony of West (i.e. “the developed countries”) in world economy and politics. The term is now used to highlight the overall influence and placing the Western countries at the center. By doing this the critiques formed by those deemed non-western is not seen (*and listened to*).

Globalization and critical study of it is a growing field and as such is not stemming only from the post-colonial studies tradition. But it can be seen as part of it when it focuses on the hegemony of the West, which is traditionally in critical globalization studies termed as neoliberal capitalism. This has close connections to the post-colonial critiques of modernity and universalism.

The reason why this thesis is focusing on the post-colonial thought is two-fold, firstly I, as a researcher see them still relevant and important, especially in the context of studying global social movements as within it there is much need for reform and self-reflection. Secondly, the critique it has produced and is still producing are useful in the analysis of global transformations such as the so-called “Arab Spring”.

### **1.1.2 Research methods and material**

This thesis is a thematic analysis of post-colonial thought. It uses the critique put forward using the terminology of post-colonial studies. The focus of the research on the themes raised up by the critical writings on Arab Spring, relating to themes of post-colonial thinking. The so-called Arab Spring has received a lot attention in the academic world and different aspects of it have been researched. I will narrow my focus on the critical notions stemming from post-colonial thinking and the shapes it takes. I will also discuss the role these notions have received in the larger discussion of the so-called Arab Spring.

First, I will give a description of the method: theory-based content analysis. After describing the method, I will move into the selection of the text and their importance, giving validation to the selection, presenting the selected texts and their role. Last part of the chapter is focused on the reflection on my own position as a researcher and how it affects the focus and selections made in the thesis.

In the thesis the analysis is based on the discussion between the theoretical background of post-colonial studies and concepts within it, such as Eurocentrism and Orientalism. Based on the concepts the thesis will look at how they were used in the discussion of the so-called “Arab Spring” and what can (and should) be learned from this critique. The collection of the sources was focused on the academic and non-academic texts using these concepts with searches using the theoretical concepts and key words. These were placed in the context of the so-called “Arab Spring”. As such these texts provide a look into the usage of the theoretical concept from the tradition of the post-colonial studies. The focus is justified as the concepts serve as a mirror to the counter-narratives within the mainstream discussion and highlight the critical voices within the discussion.

The critiques of the analysis of so-called “Arab Spring” stem from a variety of different aspects and use different analytical tools. Many raise up the issue of Orientalism (see example Ventura, 2017), Shihade, 2012) and El-Mahdi, 2011) and point out the Eurocentric views such as modernity and otherness (see for example Borg, 2016, Brownlee & Ghiabi, 2016 and Shihade, 2012). The issue has been looked from a feminist point of view (Saleh, 2016). Also, who frames the discussion and how it is presented in different medias have been under scrutiny (Almaghlouth et al., 2015 and Uludağ, 2017).

## **1.2 Structure**

In the second chapter of the thesis the background to the so-called “Arab Spring” is presented and discussed. The chapter contains a brief description of the events and how they unfolded. After this a brief overview of the literature concerning the events are introduced. Lastly this chapter briefly discusses the reasoning behind using the so-called “Arab Spring” as a case.

In Chapter 3 the theoretical background is presented. The chapter will introduce the aspects of post-colonial studies in general and why it serves as a starting point. After this the certain key concepts within the post-colonial studies are presented focusing mainly on orientalism and eurocentrism. Following these lines the chapter introduces also the critical globalization studies, which I see in some parts as part of the lineage of post-colonial studies, and the concept of transversalism.

The Chapter 4 will also discuss the actual method of collecting the post-colonial critiques that are used as a source material and why this selection was made. This Chapter will give an overview of the critical literature which will be discussed and analyzed in detail in the following chapter.

The Chapter 5 is focused on the different aspects of the post-colonial critique, what can be learned from it and how post-colonial critique can and is used as a tool. The last Chapter 6 is focused on the future: What is needed to overcome the critique presented in the past chapters and how we can move from universalist eurocentrism to a more inclusive and equal discussion, a more transversal world.

## **1.3 My role and values as a researcher**

The whole thesis is based on the notion that there is something fundamentally wrong with the mainstream analysis or the grand narrative used of the events of the so-called “Arab Spring”. To support this claim the critical voices from the fringes of the discussion are placed at the center. This of course means that I as a researcher see them as relevant and important. The events of the so-called “Arab Spring” were given much attention from the

beginning and the attention was based on the eurocentrism of the Western audiences and commentators. By eurocentrism in this context I mean that the lens the protests were looked at was the transition of the Arab world to a more Western(ized) world i.e. the transition to democracy. Still optimism soon declined and gave way to a new perspective that shows the other side of the Eurocentric view, the failure of the Arab world to turn into democracies (*in the Western sense*). This narrative shows how quickly big events such as those of the so-called “Arab Spring” are analyzed in the Eurocentric western discussion. We tend to neglect our own histories and assume that our own transitions were straight lines, but the history of for example French revolution gives a different perspective:

*Too many experts that claim sympathy to the Arab people’s struggles, and claim to be in opposition to Western hegemony and exploitation of the globe have rushed quickly to claim expertise on the Arab revolution, and to make early judgments on it weeks or few months after it started, as if it is something that ended, rather than seeing it as something that is in the making.*

*Of course, these experts failed to remember that the French Revolution, the most celebrated example of people’s power to change history according to the Eurocentric historiography, took years to achieve some of its goals, later on to be hijacked by the dictatorship of Napoleon who led the same French people to wars against European powers and to colonize large parts of the world. The slogans of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” were soon after that forgotten and domination and genocides against peoples in the Third World became the norm of the French “Republic,” and its legacy, and continues to be part and parcel of the French involvements in different parts of the world that is used for resources and hegemony. (Shihade, 2012, p. 60.)*

The above quote serves as a powerful reminder to us all to reflect on our own past and the assumptions we make based on them. Also I would like to add that when discussing issues such as democracy and power of the people, we in the West are no saints ourselves. The yellow-vest protest in France for example put the question forward, who are we in

the West to cast judgment on the protest in MENA-region, when our own societies battle with the same issues still. To give another example, we could talk about the migration and how it was and still is handled in the Western world. In many Western countries' immigrants face blatant human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2019)<sup>2</sup> and are treated as non-humans, how does this fit into the ideals of our western democracies with its human rights?

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<sup>2</sup> In an open letter to European Leaders, NGO's call to end the humanitarian and human rights crisis at the European borders.

## 2. Background and timeline of the so-called “Arab Spring”

On 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2010, a street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire at Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia, as an act of resistance after the police had confiscated his fruit-selling equipment (Dabashi 2012, p. 17). This moment has often been seen as a starting point to what is now commonly known as the “Arab Spring”, although it has also been called Arab Uprising or Awakening in the media and academic literature. Something that is worth noting is that the actual term “Arab Spring” pre-dates the events that are now called it as it was already used in 2005 with movement in the area under Bush administration. The term came to refer collectively the protests and movements after the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq that seemed to inspire movements mainly in Egypt and Lebanon. The term may have been also used in reference of the Arab Revolts of 1916-18 against the Ottoman Empire, but there is no clear evidence of this (Sabry 2012). Of course, the starting point of such a phenomenal movement that eventually inspired movements such as Indignados in Spain and Occupy-movements around the world, is hard to pinpoint and roots of the “Arab Spring” go much deeper than the act of resistance of Bouazizi. To give an example of a contradictory notion of what inspired the latest Arab Spring, Naomi Dann (2014) notes in an article that the conflict between Western Sahara protestors and Moroccan authorities after the authorities broke up violently a month-long protest Gdeim Izik in November 2010:

*Gdeim Izik has been repeatedly associated with the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, a series of protests against totalitarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Speaking on Democracy Now in February 2011, Noam Chomsky asserted that the current wave of protests began in the Western Sahara. (Dann, 2014, p. 51.)*

As is clear for above, the region has not been inactive or asleep when it comes to protests and political activities against injustice and calls for justice. The MENA-region has seen its share of protests and it is important to recognize these, when talking of the so-called “Arab Spring” of 2011. The events did not come suddenly and are part of a larger movements in the region and globally.

My focus in this thesis is on the post-colonial critiques of the so-called Arab Spring and I am focusing on the texts that apply the post-colonial theory on the events and especially the narratives of it. Additionally through this framework, I am using the so-called Arab Spring and the post-colonial critiques of it as a starting point to look at different aspects of ways forward for global social movements that try to dismantle the Eurocentrism and Orientalism within the calls for justice and solidarity.

## **2.2 Timeline of the so-called “Arab Spring”**

As stated already Bouazizi's act of resistance is commonly seen as the spark that started the so-called “Arab Spring”. What followed was protest that started locally and expanded to the national level. At the time the global media was not aware of what was happening. After Bouazizi had set himself on fire, the protest started, first locally but they quickly spread on national level. The protests were so big and surprising that then president Ben Ali issued a warning of punishment for any dissent. In January the protests had spread to neighboring country, Algeria, where rising prices was the main point. By January 13<sup>th</sup> after casualties in Tunisia, the then president Ben Ali made concessions and promises to investigate the killings and shortly after the promises fled the country leaving the prime minister in charge (Dabashi, 2012, p. 17).

After Ben Ali's resignations in 25<sup>th</sup> of January, the protests started in Egypt with what was called “Day of Rage” against the rule of the then President Hosni Mubarak. In February crowds of Egyptians (est. 1 million) had made a camp to Tahrir square calling for Mubarak to step down, leading to “Day of Departure” in 4<sup>th</sup> of February. After some talks with the opposition as an attempt for reforms, Mubarak stepped down in 11<sup>th</sup> of February. In just over two months two long-ruling regimes in MENA-region had fallen (Dabashi, 2012, p. 18-19).

Next the protests started in Libya, where they were met with violence and hundreds of people died in the clashes. On March then leader Gaddafi was investigated by International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity and Western leaders were calling him to step down and preparing military options which started in 18<sup>th</sup> of March.

After months of military actions Gaddafi was not stepping down. He was eventually killed in September. (Dabashi, 2012, p. 19-20.)

In Yemen the protests had started already in January with tens of thousands of protesters in the streets. The then president Saleh was surprised by the events and promised to draw a new constitution. After months of protests police opened fire on peaceful protesters in Sana'a leading to many regime members and military figures to defect. Saleh was not stepping down. In June, Saleh was injured and fled to Saudi-Arabia, fighting continued. (Dabashi, 2012, p. 20-21.)

In Bahrain, people launched their on "Day of Rage" on 14<sup>th</sup> of February, through social media. In Bahrain the divide was made between Sunni and Shi'a and the regime claimed the protest were instigated by Iran. After several clashes and killings of protesters, the then ruling king Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa released political prisoners, but ordered also a severe crackdown on the protests. With help of Gulf Cooperation Council and Saudi-Arabia, Bahraini security forces started to suppress the uprising and demolished the focal point Pearl Square. The two main political parties were also banned, and many protesters were imprisoned, some even sentenced to death. (Dabashi, 2012, p. 21-22.)

In February, the Syrians also declared their "Day of Rage". In Syria only few hundred protesters attended in fear of the crackdown. Many were arrested. On March protests were growing and met with violence. The President Bashar al-Assad was not about to step down. He made some reforms and released political prisoners, but protests were still under severe crackdown. By April casualties were growing and Assad and his regime was under sanctions and accused of human rights violations. Months after many Syrian had fled the country as battles continued. (Dabashi, 2012, p. 22.)

The events of the so-called "Arab Spring" changed the region radically and no country was untouched by it. Movements all over the world and continents inspired by the protests of the so-called "Arab Spring" popped up. It had also effects on the politics of the Western countries in the region. (Dabashi, 2012, p. 22-25.)



The above is an (*western perspective*) outline of how the protests spread within the region. After the initial starting point countries took their different routes and several protests and violent clashes have ensued in various countries.

*Historians invent narratives to tell a story. Like all stories, they must have a beginning, a climax, and an end. So the answer to the question “When will we be able to judge the significance of the The so-called” Arab Spring”?” is: it depends what you are looking for. (Gelvin, 2012, p. 157.)*

In a policy note produced at the Nordic Africa Institute, Eriksson (2017) asks the question “Who put the post in the post-Arab Spring?” The paper calls for a new, more positive narrative towards the events of the so-called Arab Spring and the countries themselves (p. 7). What I am trying to highlight is that the timelines of the events are somewhat irrelevant, especially when they fall into the orientalist ideas of the MENA-region. The events of the so-called Arab Spring are far from over and more importantly the call for rethinking the region and politics within it is greater than ever.

### **2.3 The “after”math**

A transition to a democracy is never easy, examples of that can be found throughout the history. As the countries that were able to oust the authoritarian leaders during the so-called “Arab Spring” (Tunisia, Yemen, Libya and Egypt), they entered an age of experimenting with new societal and political participation. For countries that remained under the leadership of their old leaders, such as Morocco or Algeria, the spirit of protest has not disappeared rather the leaders have managed to remain in power by reforms and promises of bigger democratic rights. By now we all know the situation in Syria, civil wars and humanitarian crisis with no sight of Assad stepping down or the anti-government rebel groups backing. The situation in Yemen is not that much better and it has been called the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time. Overall, in region there has been significant changes, for example with the life expectancy decreasing. In essence the root causes of the uprisings have not disappeared but rather they may have even intensified after the uprisings:

*“Five years on, Syria, Libya and Yemen have gone into downward spirals of violence, and armed insurgences have challenged the realization of democratic reforms in Egypt and Tunisia. In Egypt, many of the Mubarak era activists face growing suppression at the wake of internally waged “war on terror” against armed Islamist militants. Human rights groups and “activists are under public scrutiny and many face jail sentences for overstepping the narrowing lines of freedoms of expression and assembly... While the economic difficulties that affect young people – such as unemployment and high inflation – persist in the post-2011 era, also public debates on the role of youth in social change have continued.” (Onodera, 2016.)*

The above might seem as if the so-called “Arab Spring” has failed and the region has fallen to the same despair as before (according to the grand narrative of the region). While the outcomes may not have been as positive as where envisioned during and after the events, it is important to see the positive sides of the events and recognize that there has not been enough time to actually place judgment on the outcomes. As such, the spirit of the events still lives on and it has inspired both conversation on difficult issues and movements.

When looking at the news from recent protest around the world and in the MENA-region, there are protests rising up every year. Latest developments in Iraq (Al Jazeera, 2019a), Algeria (Chiheb, Guemar & Northey, 2019), Lebanon (el Hourri 2019) and in Egypt (Al Jazeera, 2019b) are just small examples of what has been called the second wave of the Arab Spring. I would connect also the protests in Sudan (Elnaiem 2019) to this category. My aim is not to go into detail about the recent protests and how they connect into the events of 2011, or what has been since dubbed as the so-called “Arab Spring”. What I am saying is that the narrative on failure of Arab Spring is seemingly coming too soon as the protest globally show that there actually was no end to the protests.

## **2.4 Academic literature on Arab Spring**

In their extensive analysis of academic literature written on the so-called Arab Spring, AlMaghlouth, Arvanitis, Cointet & Hanafi (2015) found out that most of the literature is written outside the Arab World, mainly in US, and in English. The majority of the texts are written in the discipline of political sciences and international relations.

The academic literature has been divided into seven different clusters with some bridges between certain clusters. Firstly, the analysis has been focused on the topic of new media (social media, information technology and globalization). These texts focus on the role of new media as a political tool against state repression and highlight the global aspect of them. Second cluster includes the radical texts that include also the text that are the focus of this thesis. The orientalist notions are contested and are set in the context of post-colonial resistance. Third cluster groups the theorists cited mostly in the Arabic, such as Habermas and Bernard Lewis. In this cluster the focus is on the importance of social justice. Especially Lewis is critiqued for his essential view of the Arab World. This cluster also includes the notions of authoritarian resilience in the region stemming from mainstream IR arguments. Lastly the role of democracy and its potential in the region is discussed through the works of Ghassan Salameh. Fourth cluster is the French-speaking authors, mostly discussing the corruption of the regimes and critique of the French foreign policy in the support of the Arab dictatorships. Cluster five discusses the notions of negative attitudes against the Arab World, mostly cited in Arabic. This includes the works of Huntington's Clash of civilizations and Fukuyama's End of history thesis. Main arguments are against the Arab exceptionalism and viability of democracy in the region. Last two clusters discuss the works citing mainstream international relations cited in English and French. In the works cited in English topics include the relation of political dynamics between the public and the regime. Focus is more on the resilience of the authoritarian regimes than on the actual dynamics of the uprisings. This cluster is seen as the leading narrative of the mainstream narration of the Arab Spring. Works cited in French try to demystify the optimism in homogenizing the use of "Arab Spring" and try to make a case for the potential of democracy in the region. Last cluster sees Turkey as a model between democratization and Islamic rule (AlMaghlouth et al., 2015).

They point out that this is due to the hegemony of the English language in academic discussion. Additionally, problematic is the disparity between different levels of the writers, those who are seen as expert are quoted a lot but rarely quote the local writers. Their position as experts comes from the hegemony of the western world in the academic discussion. In their work is also an extensive analysis of differences within the discussion and ways in which they connect (or do not) (AlMaghlouth et al., 2015).

This thesis is not focused on the extensive writing on the topic and as such differs from the excellent work of AlMaghlouth et al. (2015). Focus is on what they have described as “Radical theorist”. In their work the main theorist is Edward Said and his formulation of “Orientalism” but I will extend the field to a broader definition of post-colonial studies. This includes also the work of Said and his formulation of Othering through the concept of orientalism but expands it to other concepts such as Samir Amin’s Eurocentrism and other critiques of modernity and the hegemony of the West.

## **2.5 Naming the event matters**

What has been dubbed as “Arab Spring” by the commentators has raised up the question of how to name these complex and radical events. While they are significant from a world-historical perspective (Chomsky, Fukuyama), they are not usually named as revolution all together rather only parts (Egyptian Revolution or Jasmine Revolution). Although in research done among the activists involved in the actual events, the Arabic notions of revolution (“thawra” or “thawrat”) were the most common nominators for the events. (Alhassen 2012.) From a strict (*Western tradition*) academic point of view, the events may not fill the requirements of what is meant by the term revolution but it is important to note that it is used among the activists. This raises also the question if the term revolution is in need of reform. Many in the academic literature try to avoid this question by using additions such as “now known as” as or “so-called” before the term Arab Spring. The most problematic term is Arab Awakening as this neglects the political activity in the region that goes far beyond the events starting from 2010 (as noted above the starting point is hard to pinpoint because of this, there was no awakening rather a gradual evolution to this). Use of the term Spring also has similar problems as it refers to

blooming or coming to life, as if the region was just now opening to an idea of democracy and rest of the world was waiting it to happen. Lastly, the term Uprisings is often used in terms of the events, mostly in cases where the above problems have been acknowledged, the term is seen as more neutral, and giving more agency to the actual events and those involved in them. Some (mainly non-European commentators) point out to flaws in the term Arab as it excludes the minority groups within the region, opting to leave it out and use only Uprisings or to use an abbreviation of the region ME NA (Mediterranean and North Africa) or to opt using a completely different terms such as Dignity Revolutions. I have opted to use the term “so-called “Arab Spring”” because I feel it highlights the fact that there is a Eurocentric and orientalist viewpoint in the grand narrative of the events. The issue of the naming will be looked in more detail later on in the thesis as part of the post-colonial critique of the events.

### **3. Theoretical background**

In this chapter, I aim to introduce the theoretical background of the thesis. The thesis basis on what I have termed as post-colonial thought deriving from post-colonial studies and its tradition. Within that tradition there are certain concepts and issues that have been used in the analysis of the so-called “Arab Spring”. These concepts highlight certain key problems in the grand narrative of the events and serve as an important learning tool for the future. In addition to using the tools of post-colonial studies I am looking at how they connect and compliment the tools of critical globalization studies, namely the connection of neocolonialism and capitalism and the Eurocentric hegemony in the mainstream usage of the term globalization. By doing this and using the narrations and critiques of the so-called Arab Spring as a case, I hope to highlight the new conceptual arenas for changing the narratives and the way social change is viewed on global scale.

#### **3.1 Post-colonial studies**

Post-colonial studies are based on the understanding that colonialism was based on the pillars of knowledge and power and post-colonialism (and neocolonialism) continued the same power structure after colonialism as a system ended. In other words, post-colonialism is a continuation of the colonial processes of suppression and exchanges throughout a diverse range of societies. As such, the post-colonial theory is founded on the historical fact of European colonialism and its effects. This serves as a basis, which is then used in various different fields. The usage has diversified rapidly and the field continues to grow. (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006, p. 1-4.)

Due to rapid grow of the usage of post-colonial theory it has grown to be heterogeneous, meaning that the subjects and cases are varied. This can lead to the understanding that “post-colonialism” refers to a term of critical practice. Slemon (2006, p.52-54) has identified four ways in which colonial practices can be seen working: 1) through direct power relations 2) through institutions 3) in textuality (i.e. representations of the colonial subject) 4) in the interaction of the above.

What is the actual nature of the term colonialism? Can colonialism then be generalized? Does it always look the same? I would argue that colonialism as a term as described above refers to a system of oppressions that were generated by the imperial practices of the West and continue still today in various forms. As such they do not look always the same and differ for specific local circumstances. But the underlying causes are the same. Colonialism is a both political relation and signifying system (i.e. interaction and textuality). All oppression may not be traced back to colonialism, but the language and concepts used to analyze colonial struggles serve as tools for critical analysis that are relevant still today.

Aníbal Quijano (2007) talks of how colonialism as power structure and its successor imperialism produced a power structure where Eurocentric colonial domination and relations it created eventually came to be seen as objective and natural. The power structure it created is still the framework within which social relations operate. While political colonialism might have ended, the division of European culture (Western) and others continue to be a relationship of colonial domination. European culture came to be seen as the universal cultural model. What Quijano refers to as coloniality is what came after colonialism and continues today to be the “general form of domination”. Central to this was the concept of race. These racialized categories have then entered into the current form of coloniality i.e. the Eurocentric capitalist colonial power. The coloniality of power is linked via the construction of the Eurocentric capitalism into the modernity/rationality, where the West is seen as the universal model and the rest as inferior. Breaking this connection is central to move towards decoloniality. Decoloniality means that the universality of the West must be broken and open possibilities for new forms of intercultural relations.

*The liberation of intercultural relations from the prison of coloniality also implies the freedom of all peoples to choose, individually or collectively, such relations: a freedom to choose between various cultural orientations, and, above all, the freedom to produce, criticize, change, and exchange culture and society. This liberation is, part of the process of social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and as domination. (Quijano, 2007, p.178.)*

Jack Goody (2007) makes a point in the book “Theft of history” to show how the West has hijacked the narration of history by imposing a Eurocentric view. The imposed view of history is based on colonial worldview of the West and neglects the developments in other parts of the world. Goody suggests a new look of modern history where these other developments are recognized and not narrowed to a Eurocentric narration of history.

J.M Blaut (1993) shows in “Colonizers model of the World” how the West lives under a false impression that its civilization is due to its superiority. This is done by neglecting the influence of other cultures and imposing “the West” as universal model. Blaut tries to make visible the errors in the notion of the “European miracle” and how it has intruded the mindset of scholars in the West. This mindset imposes the rationality and modernity of the characteristic of the West and as such sees it as superior to other regions. Blaut’s analysis shows the flaws in this narration. Within the mindset, Colonialism played a central role in the rise of this framework.

*the purpose of this book is to undermine one of the most powerful beliefs of our time concerning world history and world geography. This belief is the notion that European civilization – “The West” – has had some unique historical advantage, some special quality of race or culture or environment or mind or spirit, which gives this human community a permanent superiority over all other communities, at all times in history and down to the present. (Blaut, 1993, p. 1.)*

Vijay Prashad (2017) notes that the political discussion is “impoverished by the lack of the category ‘imperialism’” (p. 2536). For Prashad acknowledging or rather by not naming the impacts of western domination, we are not fully recognizing the role of the West within the global political hegemony. As such, terms such as globalization and neo-liberalism, while they are useful, do not represent the whole picture. Or as I see, they do not explicitly put the focus on the West same way as would naming them as imperialism or post/neo-colonialism. Prashad (2012) also shows that the attempts to decolonize the Third World are undermined by the continuing project of imperialism and domination that also affects the Arab world. Prashad notes that “Global South” is now a place where the protests against “the theft of the commons, against the theft of human dignity and rights, against the undermining of the democratic institutions, and the promises of



modernity” manifest itself. The West is trying to dismiss this as the grand narrative of the so-called “Arab Spring” shows (ibid., p. 52).

### **3.2 Post-colonialism in academia**

Slemon (2006, p. 55) has raised an important question, what there is outside of colonialism? This can be understood as a question of what makes it stand out of other critical traditions. The aim of post-colonial studies and theory is towards the goal of decolonization, and this is not evident in any other field. Dismantling the colonial structures and oppression they cause are still important today. The referent of post-colonial studies is a form of political, economic and discursive oppression that can be termed as colonialism. The effects of which are evident in local levels. These must be addressed in some form in post-colonial studies to avoid the neocolonization of the discipline itself.

Amin (1989) argues that the Eurocentric dimension of the dominant paradigm in Western social sciences is “internalized to the point that it most often operates without anyone noticing it”, echoing the observations of Thomas Kuhn on all paradigms. According to Amin this leaves the door open for false Eurocentric ideas of humanity and its development (p. 115).

### **3.3 Agency in (post-)colonialism?**

The colonial mindset is important when we are discussing the role of agency within the (post-)colonial system of domination. Are people just passive victims or is the relationship much more complicated? Homi K. Bhabha (2006) sees hybridity talks about the way the oppression affects the people under the colonial rule. Hybridity can be seen as a reflection and impression of the colonial practices on people, the way they act under colonial rule. This creates a hybrid, not quite at the same level as the oppressor but obedient enough. The created mimicry creates also spaces for resistance (p. 38-43).

Slemon (2006, p. 55) raises the subject of agency under colonial power into the one of the essential questions of post-colonial studies. For him, agency is about “who or what acts oppositionally, when ideology or discourse or psychic processes of some kind construct human subjects”. Suleri (2006, p.108) calls for breaking of the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized. “The intimacy of the colonial” creates a space where it becomes important to ask about the nature of agency and alterity, or as Mohanty has formulated “Just how other, we need to force ourselves to indicate, is the Other?” (Mohanty, 1989, p. 5 in Suleri, 2006, p.108).

“Can the subaltern speak” is a key text, when talking of representation and how the colonial rule created the category of other, subaltern, that can’t represent itself, it needs to be represented by the West (Spivak 2006). Mohanty (1984) has shown this in “Under the Western eyes”, within the construction of “Third World women as singular monolithic subject” in Western feminist text. For both, colonialism is the used in the construction of subjects. Within the construction there is a relation of domination and suppression.

### **3.4 Globalization and post-colonial theory**

My analysis of post-colonial thought leads me to think that could neocolonialism and neoliberal capitalist globalization be seen as the same process? The connection of globalization and post-colonial theory can be seen as that they both demonstrate the power structures in world scale (i.e. the imperialism of the West) and that they both refer to local level oppressions and struggles within the same power structure. They both make an important notion that the transformations of political and economic relations cannot (*or rather shouldn't?*) anymore be explained by a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change.

There are of course important question relating to the connections, for example where colonialism fits in globalization and how does it present itself. However, in my view in addition to above they share a common language of solidarity and concepts within the post-colonial tradition are important in the conceptual renewal of the globalization studies, especially the critical form of it.

The connection of post-colonialism and critical globalization studies is most clear for me, when looked at the problems they raise up. One key common concept and critique placed is the hegemony of the West and universality it tries to create. This universality is something they both fight against. For me, one of the clearest attempts to contest this is the formulation of transversal cosmopolitanism by S. A. Hamed Hosseini, Barry K. Gills & James Goodman (2016) in “Toward Transversal Cosmopolitanism: Understanding Alternative Praxes in the Global Field of Transformative Movements”, that stems from the critical globalization studies and contest to the neoliberal agenda. As such the roots of transversalism is in feminist tradition (Yuval-Davis 1999) and it has been used before also by Karen Buckley (2013) in examining global social justice movements.

In their work Hosseini et al. (2016) authors are working out alternatives for global capitalism and ways forward within the contestation to it. The authors find that cosmopolitanism, a critical understanding of it, could serve as a framework for finding and analyzing solidarities among the social movements and of agency that rises to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal economic globalization. The four modalities of their cosmopolitan framework are: 1) the inter-nationalist, which while offering post-neoliberal alternatives remains within the nationalistic framework 2) alter-cosmopolitan, aims to transform the global capitalist relations through policy reforms and institution-building 3) post-cosmopolitan, that rejects the capitalist relations and focuses on autonomous spaces of resistance and the idea of commons in a local scale 4) transversal cosmopolitan, which takes on the challenge of organizing the post-capitalist relations through relatively autonomous spaces, while expanding those spaces to a larger transnational solidarity network(s). (Hosseini et al. 2016, p. 4-5.) The transversal cosmopolitan can be seen as a continuation of the transversalistic idea of the global civil society framed by Buckley (2013). I will next present the transversal cosmopolitanism put forward by Hosseini et al. (2016) in more detail, as I see it as an important tool to look at in which ways the contestation of globalization and decoloniality could take the next step further and in which ways it has already taken those steps.

The authors note that cosmopolitanism as a meta-ideology imposed into the field of global justice and transformative movements has the same problems than imposing any other ideology or mode. But as they argue it will allow a special focus, that is much needed,” on the multiplicity of cosmopolitan subjects and their projects”, and as such ways of

understanding the ways in which "global solidarities are made and how they change". Following the path of Buckley, seeing transversalism as something that goes beyond dualism of hegemony/counter-hegemony, transversalism ables us to go deeper into the interactions between contestation and globalization. The author find that transversalism has 6 defining characteristics: 1) recognition of diversity and difference within the field of transformative action, 2) dialogue and deliberation across differences, 3) systemic self-reflection, 4) intentional engagement to explore contending experiences, 5) acknowledgment of power relations between sources of resistance, and 6.) a commitment to creating common agendas, proposals, and programs directed at gaining practical political leverage. Here, alternative cosmo-politics emerges from the exchange of experiences, building on meaningful experience to transcend it. Lastly transversalism must be seen as a network in which the transformative social movements are understood as an "constellation of dynamic ideational contentions and political co-evolutions" and as a call for "more sophisticated and systematically articulated levels of inter-ideological exchange, dialogue, and progressive learning". This can only be done by going beyond the dualism and to seek deeper exchanges between movements in order for us to find real alternatives to "existing capitalist social relations". (Hosseini et al. 2016.)

Abdullah Ocalan's theoretical work on "Democratic Confederalism" (2011), that has been experimented and implemented by the Kurdish people in Northern Syria, Rojava, is an example of building a state that is built on an alternative to the global domination of the modern capitalist system. This has been at the center of Ocalan's work when building the model, as the author notes also that it needs to be recognized for not to be involved with new dependencies (ibid., p. 7).

Ocalan sees that nation-state, while falsely though to be "concerned with the fate of the common people" is actually maintaining the worldwide capitalist system. Nation-state in other words is the colonial manifestation of the capital (Ocalan, 2011, p. 13). The model of democratic confederalism is built on the other on the pillars of ecology and feminism. It is open to other political groups and factions. The nature of it is "flexible, multi-cultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented". It is built on both vertical and horizontal formations of political groups and essentially allows equal coexistence of different political associations, such as republic or democracy (ibid., p. 21-22). The key element of the model, in regards on the aim of this thesis, is that democratic

confederalism it drafts an alternative model for modernity i.e. “democratic modernity” (ibid, p. 24-25).

*Democratic modernity is the roof of an ethics-based political society. As long as we make the mistake to believe that societies need to be homogeneous monolithic entities it will be difficult to understand confederalism. (Ocalan, 2011, p. 24.)*

As such, I see, it is then a challenge to the universalistic ideas and ideals of state-formations and social relations. It also continues the challenge to the global justice and solidarity movements, as it is built on coexistence and vertical power relations.

*Modernity’s history is also a history of four centuries of cultural and physical genocide in the name of an imaginary unitary society. Democratic confederalism as a sociological category is the counterpart of this history and it rests on the will to fight if necessary as well as on ethnic, cultural, and political diversity. (Ocalan, 2011, p. 25.)*

### **3.5 Key concepts**

Next chapter is focused on presenting the theoretical roots of the key concepts used in the thesis. Two main concepts are orientalism and eurocentrism. The history of the concepts and how they are used are looked in more detail. These key concepts serve as a base for the analysis in the next chapters.

The concepts will be looked at from the original sources, Said’s “Orientalism: Western conceptions of the orient” (1978) and Amin’s Eurocentrism (1989) as well as from different texts that have further developed these concepts and used them in different settings.

### 3.5.1 Orientalism

In his book “Orientalism: Western conceptions of the orient” Said (1978) laid out a theoretical basis on ways in which the Western Academic study of “the orient” was flawed and represented an image subordinate to Europe, called the Other. The orient in Said words the Orient has helped shape the image of Europe (also called West). Orientalism is then “a style of thought based upon the...distinction made between “the Orient” and...”the Occident” “(Said, 1978, p.1-2).

*Orientalism, as developed by Edward Said and later used by different scholars to explain similar reality in regards to different regions and groups of people from around the world, is a concept that explains how Europe/the West and its knowledge production, including literary production, viewed the peoples/societies of the Orient (in Said’s case, Arabs and Muslims) were seen and represented as passive, backward, chaotic, violent, and always in needs of Western intervention/help in order to become orientalism and eurocentrism always in needs of Western intervention/help in order to become, if possible, modern and rational beings. (Shihade 2012.)*

The conceptual work of Said in other words lays out a theoretical background for analyzing the narratives that are created by “Europe/the West” and shows the power-relations in the creation. The main realization of Said’s work is that the West uses the Orient as a subject to mirror itself and by default creates a subordinate image of the Orient. This process is called Othering. The other, which in the case of Orientalism is Orient (Arabs/Muslims), is presented as in need of western intervention and its subordinate. This can also be seen as causing the divide of them and us, in which them is the other and us the west. The narratives of the West and hegemony are done through the gaze of us i.e. the West. Orientalism together with other concepts are important tools in breaking this narrative. (Said, 1978.)

According to Edward Said’s classic account, “Orientalism” is the western view of the “Orient”, which is ethnocentric, essentialist and deeply influenced by colonialism and imperialism. Orientalism disregards concrete historical contexts and produces abstract and even “mythical” images of the “Orientals” and of the “other” in general. The tendency

to generalize and the lack of critical and historical considerations are among the most striking marks of the Orientalist attitude towards the non-western world. Said addresses generalizations concerning the Arabs when he considers accounts and comments about the Arab mind and character (Said, 1975, p. 412 in Ventura, 2017). The Orientalist way of thinking is possible because the West is the subject, the one who studies and speaks, and the East is the object, the one who is studied and spoken about. (Ventura, 2017, p.285.)

*In most cases, orientalism was cast in contrast to the much unanticipated events of the Arab uprisings by the West, which has long since attributed negative values to the otherness of the Orient (Erdem, 2012; Shelley, 2011). The orientalist notion of the inability of Arabs to govern themselves under democratic regimes is heavily contested, using the revolutions as evidence for political agency and self-determination. Generally, references to Said and others in this niche are set in the context of post-colonial resistance. (in Al-Maghlouth et al., 2015.)*

Post-colonial resistance is connected to ways of representation. This means for example the role of text and textuality and education. Representations of the colonialist are visible in multiple arenas of media. Post-colonial resistances to these colonialist representations have taken many forms, utilizing the same arenas. The nature and practice of post-colonial resistances are central to post-colonial debates. Earlier theories have focused mainly on the binaries such as center/margin and colonizer/colonized, but these are shifting to the interactions and connection within those binaries, something that has always been implicit. Suleri calls this “peculiar intimacy” of the colonizer and colonized. Globalization has played a role in the thinking of the locality of the resistances, Elleke Boehmer has pointed out to the imperialistic infrastructures as a web of cross-colonial connections that often also facilitate cross-colonial resistances. The complexity of the connections and theorizing them without forgetting the “persisting and historic inequalities” within the structures is vital in contemporary post-colonial history and theory. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006, p. 93-94.)

*In this article, I understand Orientalism as does Zachary Lockman, who defines it as, fundamentally about partaking of a representation of the*

*Orient that assumed that it was ontologically—that is, in its very being or essential nature—radically different from (and usually inferior to) ‘our’ own Western world, a stance that could be (and was) adopted even by those who were unprejudiced or even sympathetic to Arabs, Muslims, Islam and so on, or indeed by ‘Orientals’ or Muslims themselves. (Borg, 2016, p. 215.)*

### **3.5.2 Eurocentrism**

In Samir Amin’s words, eurocentrism can be seen as a “culturalist phenomenon” as it makes assumptions of historical paths of people. It is also an anti-universalist idea in essence as it neglects the alternatives and does not seek “possible general laws of human development”. But it presents itself as a universalist vision, claiming that “imitation of the Western model by all peoples is the only solution to the challenges of our time”. (Amin 1989.)

Eurocentrism can be seen as a fairly modern phenomenon and it is closely tied into the modern capitalist system. It is a distortion, from which mainstream dominant social theories suffer from. It is a paradigm and like any other paradigm it functions spontaneously and is implanted in the “seemingly obvious facts and common sense”. It manifest itself in various ways; in the expression of ideas, media and in the works of social scientist. (Amin, 1989)

According to Amin (1989) the “aspiration for rationality and universalism” is not a product of the modern world. He sees that it has been always part of human action and throughout history ideologies have been made towards it. However, according to Amin, universalism has only an idea before the development of European capitalism, and alongside it came the power to impose itself and its values on worldwide scale. This developed feeling of superiority is the moment when “Eurocentrism crystallizes”.

*Euro-Centrism, connected to the concept of modernity, is used here in the framework developed by Samir Amin, among others, where knowledge*



*production, concepts, frameworks about human societies produced in Europe/the West became global/universal ones. (Shihade, 2012, p. 57.)*

*Amin defines Eurocentrism as (a) a theory of world history in which Europe is unique and superior, and (b) as a global political project which legitimates expansionism and such notions as "manifest destiny" and "the white man's burden" (p. 74). One might add that colonialism and imperialism have at their core the unshakeable conviction of the superiority of their cultural and political systems. Indeed, imperialist aggression is inherent in the Eurocentric worldview. (Moghadam, 1989, p. 84.)*

Eurocentrism as a dominant social phenomenon is easy to see in the “multiplicity of its daily manifestations” but on the other hand difficult to define precisely. It is present in the everyday relationships, in the political information and opinion and society and culture for example. Their manifestations can be violent but sometimes they remain subtle.

*Although Eurocentrism has multiple incarnations, overall it can be described as the sensibility that Europe is historically, economically, culturally and politically distinctive in ways that significantly determine the overall character of world politics. As a starting point, we might regard it as a conceptual and philosophical framework that informs the construction of knowledge about the social world – a foundational epistemology of Western distinctiveness. In this sensibility, ‘Europe’ is a cultural-geographic sphere (Bhambra, 2010: 5), which can be understood as the genealogical foundation of ‘the West’. In his piece ‘Eurocentrism and Its Avatars’, Immanuel Wallerstein (1997) argues that many critical literatures in world history nonetheless reproduce tropes of Eurocentrism in their analyses. (in Sabaratnam, 2013, p. 261.)*

*Drawing from the work of Martin Bernal, Amin identifies four elements of the Eurocentric construct: 1) it removes Ancient Greece from the very milieu in which it unfolded and developed - the Orient- and arbitrarily annexes Hellenism to Europe; 2) it is racist; 3) it interprets Christianity,*

*also annexed arbitrarily to Europe, as the principal factor in the maintenance of European cultural unity; 4) it concurrently constructs a vision of the Near East and the more distant Orients on racist foundations and by employing an immutable vision of religion (in Moghadam, 1989, p. 90.)*

Eurocentrism as theorized by Amin (1989) points out the several and deep flaws within “the impossible project” of eurocentrism, such as the implemented ideology of development that is seen as a legacy of colonization and has not reduced the North-South gap. Colonization has certainly played a role in the unequal development of capitalism, but for Amin this is not enough. Eurocentrism is unable to see any other lives than those of the modern world and as such claims to be founded on humanist universalism, but through its own actions it negates it. The world promoted by Eurocentrism has been part of the altering of peoples and civilizations.

*It should be noted that before Amin's Eurocentrism, even before Said's Orientalism, there was Jalal Al-e Ahmad's Gharbzadegi. This polemical piece against westernization, written in the mid-1960s by Iran's well-known populist writer, became enormously influential especially during the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution. The term gharbzadegi has been variously translated as occidentosis, westoxication, euromania. It is in all events a kind of illness, a plague from the West that turns domestic intellectuals into alien-sounding effete snobs. (Moghadam, 1989, p. 87.)*

Amin (1989) does not neglect the fact that others have theorized the westernization of the world before him, but he critiques the starting point of the religious divide provided by them.

The connection of capitalism and eurocentrism leads to humanity making a choice between socialist universalism and Eurocentric capitalist barbarism. As such, Amin calls for the Left to be aware of the fundamental questions raised by his critique. While unequal development and the false universalism promoted by the Eurocentric capitalism are dominant even years after the work of Amin, the same hope remains: “The future is still open. It is still to be lived” (Amin, 1989, p. 216).

### 3.6 Conclusions of theoretical background

In this chapter I have made clear my standpoint on the relevance of post-colonial studies and how it will be used in the future chapters of this thesis. For me, the post-colonial theory is an important tool which has been used to analyze and critique the representations and assumptions made of the events that are the subject of the next chapters, the so-called Arab Spring.

Post-colonialism and its extension neocolonialism are based on the power structure created by the historical colonial rule of the West. This history and power relations are at the core of post-colonial studies and still relevant in the narratives created of the people and events in the Global South. The most important theoretical aspiration of any academic work done from the post-colonial studies viewpoint should be towards decolonization and breaking the mainstream narratives.

Through utilizing two concepts deriving from the post-colonial tradition, Eurocentrism and Orientalism, this thesis aims to show how the issues pointed out by the concepts are still relevant in today's narratives of the Global South. Amin with his conceptual work on Eurocentrism has pointed out the false idea of universalism within the narratives that actually negate the whole idea of universalism. Said and Orientalism gives a detailed description of the relationship and power relations in the connections of the West and Global South (Orient and Occident). Breaking of the grand narrative that uses Global South as a mirror for us in the West and creates the balance of power is based on the recognition of the structure that creates the flawed narrative.

To put things simply, a new way of interaction is needed. West must abandon the false idea of the humanist universalism that is actually not at all universal. For this project dismantling the old and new manifestations of colonialism in its all forms is the most important issue. At the core of this is the breaking of them-us divide and recognition of the voices of the subaltern.

*For those who see themselves as being engaged in a post-imperial or anti-imperial critical project, however, it is imperative that a serious effort is made to dismiss not just the old crude versions of Eurocentrism, but the new*

*manifestations in which it quietly re-presents itself. As I have just suggested, this is best achieved through taking seriously questions of subjects' presence, positionality and the materiality of experience as the starting points for critical understandings of intervention. (Sabaratnam, 2013, p. 274.)*

*To put the matter slightly differently, why is all thought in the 'non-West' always colonized by the political? (Nigam, 2013.)*

## **4. Methods and sources**

In this chapter I am going to justify my selection of the texts for sources and why I see these as the relevant texts within the chosen framework of post-colonial critique. I will also provide a short description of the overall themes within texts that are present in the post-colonial critique in the texts, how it is used and why it is important when looking at the so-called Arab Spring.

First, I will give a description of the method: theory-based content analysis. After describing the method, I will move into the selection of the text and their importance, giving validation to the selection, presenting the selected texts and their role. Last part of the chapter is focused on the reflection on my own position as a researcher and how it affects the focus and selections made in the thesis.

### **4.1 Description of the method**

The analysis made on this thesis is based on content analysis, where the different texts are examined by using the theory and concepts provided by post-colonial studies, mainly eurocentrism and orientalism. According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2018, p. 127-138) theory-guided content analysis means that, theory and concepts are used as a given to a certain phenomenon, distinguishing it from analysis where data produces the concepts. As such, it could be considered a sort of a theory-guided content analysis on the critical post-colonial literature on the so-called Arab Spring. My thesis does not fit the method perfectly and partly it has elements of also theory-based content analysis and also elements of a theoretical study. The method was chosen partly because these concepts and the post-colonial tradition/theory are the primary source for the critique on the narratives of the so-called Arab Spring, when examining the selected texts.

Reflecting on Gläser & Laudel (1999, in Kohlbacher, 2005) content analysis can be “an interesting form of data analysis for projects that aim to start from theory and contribute to it”. This is mainly what I aim to do in this thesis, use post-colonial theory as a foundation and contribute to its efforts towards decolonization and beyond. As such my

goal is not to say truths about the so-called Arab Spring or post-colonial theory, but rather see the ways it is used.

## **4.2 Selection of texts**

Main sources for the analysis of the thesis are texts that use post-colonial studies as a basis for the critical assessment of the narratives of the so-called Arab Spring. A quick search on Web of Science using the terms “Arab Revolution; Arab Spring; Arab Uprising; Arab Awakening; Arab Upheaval” brings up over 3,000 articles. The amount of texts dealing with the topic is immense and as such not all of them can be the focus. The reasoning of limiting the focus to post-colonial critique of the narratives was done to fit the size of the task at hand. In their research, AlMaghlouth et al. (2015) used the same terms to study the question of who frames the debate of the so-called Arab Spring. At the time of their research, the amount of texts was 519, so the debate on the so-called Arab Spring is still going on in the academic circles. I have narrowed my research into the post-colonial tradition within the discussion, using key terms such as orientalism and eurocentrism. The selection gives and inside to the discussion from a critical perspective, where the multitude of texts are viewed from a critical post-colonial point of view.

As my aim is to highlight the coloniality in the narratives on the so-called Arab Spring it is important to note that the main issue is to bring up the mainly non-Western voices that are at the fringe of the discussion. As such within the texts, there are also non-academic texts from variety of mediums. This serves as a way to include the critical voices that are missing from the mainstream narratives. As such, post-colonial theory serves as an important reminder of the neocolonialism within the academia and one way to overcome this is to use variety of text regardless of their status in within the academic literature.

### **4.3 Description of the material used as examples of post-colonial discourse**

Hamid Dabashi's book "The Arab Spring: End of Postcolonialism" (2012) was the starting point for the analysis of this thesis. I have done research on the subject of the so-called Arab Spring for years and read a great amount of literature on it from different perspectives. But I felt that in the majority of the texts the focus was not interesting, and something was missing. Dabashi's book opened my eyes for the critique from post-colonial perspective, especially for the orientalist and Eurocentric critique. In the book Dabashi paves a way towards a new look on the Arab world and to the end of post-colonialism as a mindset.

Ventura (2017) gives an important overview in "The "Arab Spring" and Orientalist Stereotypes: The Role of Orientalism in the Narration of the Revolts in the Arab World" of the way the narratives of the so-called Arab Spring are built on orientalist stereotypes and abstractions of the Arab Countries. The problem of seeing the Western model of modernity and democracy as ideal of progress shows the ethnocentricity within the analysis. As the narratives are built on the orientalist and ethnocentric stereotypes it undermines the reliability of the interpretations and shows the need for creating a more "accurate knowledge of Arab countries".

Shihade's (2012) article "On the Difficulty in Predicting and Understanding the Arab Spring: Orientalism, Euro-Centrism, and Modernity" provides evidence for the ways in which the "three dynamics" of orientalism, euro-centrism and modernity lead to misunderstanding of the events and meaning of the so-called Arab Spring. The three concepts have a long history of shaping our knowledge of the Arab world. Shihade calls for the recognition of the complexity and challenges for the mainstream.

Almaghlouth, et al. (2015) provide an overview of the academic literature on the so-called Arab Spring in their article "Who frames the debate on the Arab uprisings? Analysis of Arabic, English, and French academic scholarship". In the article one of the points they raise is that most of the knowledge production is made outside the Arab world, mainly by American academics in English. They also raise up the issue of the relationship between those deemed "experts" (US-based academics) and what they call third level producers, on how the local voices use the experts as a way to try to legitimize their work but the

“experts” do not cite these local voices. While the work itself is not clearly post-colonial, the conclusions within the work compliment the claims of the post-colonial critique of knowledge production.

In their<sup>3</sup> critical commentary “Academic Tourists Sight-Seeing the Arab Spring” (2013) Mona Abaza talks about the frustration on the relationship of local researchers and informants and international researchers. Abaza sees that the relationship highlights the inequalities and orientalist attitudes within the academia, where non-Europeans are reduced to “objects of observation”. This text provides an inside to the actual fieldwork and problems within when talking about the narratives of the so-called Arab Spring.

Karim Malak & Sara Salem’s article “Reorientalizing the Middle East: The Power Agenda Setting Post-Arab Uprisings” (2015) examine the voices that claim to be critical and post-orientalist and how they resort to the same mechanisms as the orientalists before them, due to assumptions and claims made of the MENA-region. They trace this back to the neoliberal agenda and the way it dominates against (and despite) the postcolonial interventions. The text is a great example of the problems of claiming to be critical without actually examining the analysis made. If this is not overcome, Middle East remains to be seen as a stagnant entity.

In a comment-piece “Orientalising the Egyptian Uprising” (2011) Rahab El-Mahdi talks about the ways in which the new grand-narrative constructed by the international media and academia seemingly tries to move beyond the old orientalist narratives, but falls to the same pitfalls:

*As such in the new grand narrative of “Arab Awakening” both academics and the media (international and local) are appropriating, interpreting, and representing the recent events along the same pillars of othering and, romanticization, while casting universalist-Eurocentric judgments.*

The text was chosen as it is a central piece of commentary raising up the post-colonial critique of the narratives on the so-called “Arab Spring”. It also shows the mechanisms

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<sup>3</sup> I have opted to use the pronoun they when analyzing the critiques in this thesis for both multiple and singular context to remain gender-neutral. For me this is important as I hope to build a more intersectional approach.



at play in the construction of the liberal analysis that tries to be open-minded but falls to the same classification of them-us, putting in the center the Western ideas of development and society.

In a blog-text “Please Reconsider the Term “Arab Spring”” (2012) Maytha Alhassen examines critically the problems of using the term “Arab Spring”. In the analysis, Alhassen provides compelling reasons for reconsidering the usage of the term and why it should be disregarded for alternatives that are more inclusive. The text was chosen to provide inside into the ways even the naming of the events shows the Eurocentric and orientalist nature of the narratives.

In an article “Beware the winter is coming! Arab Spring in the global media” (2017) Petra Cafnik Uludağ contributes to the study of global media in creating the narrative(s) on the so-called Arab Spring. The article points out to the Eurocentric origin of the narrative on the revolutionary events and how it makes the analysis of the events limited and contributes to the Eurocentric ideas of progress and modernity. The usage of these notions by the media has a role in how the events are perceived and can de-emphasize the actual nature of the events. This text has a role within the analysis of the thesis as it shows the role of media in the narratives and its connections to a longer tradition of colonial ideas and practices.

Layla Saleh’s article “(Muslim) Woman in Need of Empowerment” (2016) looks at the orientalist stereotypes within the US foreign policies after the so-called Arab Spring. The focus is on the assumption of (muslim) women in need of empowerment (by the western countries) that is based on a neo-orientalist understanding of Islam. As such, it also negates the role of women in the events of the so-called Arab Spring and sees them as only objects of foreign policy (based on orientalist assumptions). The texts show through the feminist approach the same issues of eurocentrism and orientalism as the previous texts and as such is an important perspective on the narratives of the so-called Arab Spring.

“The Arab Uprisings, the Liberal Civilizing Narrative and the Problem of Orientalism” (2016) by Stefan Borg “engages the problem of Orientalism in Western elite foreign policy discourse on the Arab uprisings.” By this, Borg means that Orientalist notions have

played a key and problematic role in the discourse of Western countries in relation to the events of the so-called Arab Spring. Borg puts the notion of human rights to the center within this discussion and sees them as part of the liberal civilizing agenda of the West. By this Borg means that human rights as a manifestation of the orientalist and Eurocentric idea is at the center of the division within the narration of the Arab World, differing “them” from “us” (read: West):

*Human rights in this narrative play a crucial role since their universality guarantees that the West knows what the Arab world wants (Borg, 2013, p. 212).*

The text shows from a different perspective the orientalist division. It also raises up a key element of universality within the narration, which I will analyze more closely later on in the thesis.

In a book “Demanding Dignity: Young Voices from the Front Lines of the Arab Revolutions” (2012) edited by Maytha Alhassen and Shihab Eldin is collected stories from different activists around the MENA-region, who were actually at the front lines of the protests. These stories show the different faces of the protests and how they varied from country to country. They show the bravery of the activists, who were faced with oppression and violence by the ruling regimes. They show insides to the neglected parts of the protests from countries like Yemen and Bahrain that are not talked about in the grand narrative. They show that after the protests the change was not so simple, but there is a long way to go. The book was chosen to be part of the collection of the sources for the reason just mentioned, the voices of the frontlines. It tells a different story from the grand narrative. It shows that in the western representations the voices of the people are missing.

Nicola Pratt (2013) talks of “gender paradox” by examining the role of Egyptian women in the protests in an article at “Egyptian Women: Between Revolution, Counter-Revolution, Orientalism, and "Authenticity"”. The women are at the same time seen as active protestors and victims. The victimized women are the dominant narrative in the West. It also shows that the way women are perceived in the West relies on the ways they fit into the narration of the West and its ideals. The text shows both the orientalist

stereotypes in representations and Eurocentric notions of ideals of how women should be seen, or rather how the difference between the suppressed Arab women and liberated western women is created by the representation in the western media.

Soumaya Ghannoushi's opinion piece on Al-Jazeera "Rebellion: Smashing stereotypes of Arab women" (2011), shows how women were at the forefront of the so-called Arab Spring. It shows how in the West the orientalist stereotype of passive and submissive is being shattered by the brave women, in hijabs and unveiled, at the center of the protests. While the women are protesting against authoritarian regimes, they are also fighting against the stereotypes and patriarchy. As such the text is an important piece in recognizing the different aspects and actors in the protests. It also shows the impact the protests have had on the agency of the women, or rather how it is perceived.

"Uprisings in 'Arab Streets', Revolutions in 'Arab Minds'! A Provocation" (2011) by Nevzat Soguk is as it says on the title a provocation that calls for political solidarities beyond the "familiar civilizational discourses". Soguk sees that the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" are transformative regardless of their outcome. The critical text is a great example of calls for alternative forms of solidarity that break the Eurocentric ideas of change.

Sedef-Arat- Koc's article "Dance of Orientalisms and waves of catastrophes: culturalism and pragmatism in imperial approaches to Islam and the Middle East" (2014) puts to the center the role of the West in shaping the MENA region and how orientalism has played a role in the policies. Even the anti-orientalist approaches can reproduce the same orientalist stereotypes and acknowledging that is important. The text shows that the West has had a role in shaping the region and this should be recognized when analyzing the so-called Arab Spring. On the other hand, while recognizing the orientalism at play, there is a need to avoid being seemingly anti-orientalist while reproducing the same orientalist stereotypes.

Rami G. Khouri's (2011) opinion piece "Drop the Orientalist term 'Arab Spring'" in Daily Star, makes a claim for how the actual term Arab Spring makes visible the orientalist stereotypes, such as passivity. Khouri also suggest that the reason the West is so reluctant to acknowledge the agency of the people in protests is that the West does not want to recognize its' role in creating the authoritarian regimes and ways the West has

benefited from keeping those regimes alive. The opinion piece is a powerful call for the recognition of the agency of the people and also a call for critically assess the role of the West.

In “The Arab Revolutions: The Emergence of a New Political Subjectivity” (2012) Sari Hanafi maps out the different actors in the movements and constructs a new type of political subjectivity. Essentially Hanafi places the “people” in the protests to the center. In the article Hanafi also points out the flaws in the grand narrative by stating that the orientalist presentation does not capture the extent of the events. As such Hanafi’s text is a great resource when talking of the agency within the protests and in the representations of them.

Billie Jeanne Brownlee & Mazyar Ghiabi’s article “Passive, Silent and Revolutionary: The ‘Arab Spring’ Revisited” (2016) is an “interdisciplinary quest” to make visible the othering within the study of revolutions and revolts. The main issue, in regards of my thesis, is that they raise up the unheard voices and make a claim to put them into the center.

#### **4.4 Reflections on my own position as a researcher**

In discussing issues such as the so-called Arab Spring, the mainstream narratives are centered around a Eurocentric system of knowledge creation and on the universality of the Western model as ideal. This means that in order to break the colonial power relations within the discussion, there is a need to give space for voices of non-western academics and commentators. I have chosen to put these voices at the center of the arguments of my thesis. As such, my thesis is not about giving space, rather it is a critical self-reflection of the ways our (western) knowledge is created and what needs to change within it to move beyond coloniality. I cannot speak for the subaltern as I am not part of that group, but what I can do is give a space for the voices coming from it and to use them as a tool for shifting the way we construct narratives in the Western media and academia.

Following the traces of Lund (2014) in their text on the making of a case and doing research, I see that as researchers we are drawn to certain things and make our own selections when choosing our focus, methods and theoretical aspects:

*Scholarly inquiry is not objective; we have objectives with our research, that is, certain concerns we want to investigate. Science itself cannot tell us whether an issue is significant or not. As investigators, we establish frames of inquiry through which we understand the world. (Ibid., p. 226.)*

*One does not begin the exploratory phase of research with a completely open mind. And one is not equally interested in all aspects of human life. One is already primed by conceptual and theoretical impulses from scholarly work on different places and issues. (Ibid., p. 231.)*

What I am essentially trying to point out with the quotes from Lund's text is that I as a researcher have my own set of ideas on certain issues and ways of looking at them. As such, I am not objective: my own assumptions and opinions affect the way I read the narrative on the so-called Arab Spring.

## **5. Examining the post-colonial critique**

In this chapter, I will give an overview of the themes that are drawn from the critique of the literature on the so-called Arab Spring. After the general overview, the themes are examined in more detail using the terminology and theories of the post-colonial studies as a framework. The aim of the chapter is to show different aspects of the critique. In addition, it aims to show how post-colonial theory is useful in understanding and reading the critiques.

Brownlee & Ghiabi (2016) talk of scholarship of silence<sup>4</sup>, where the unheard voices, hidden actions and defiant tactics of the ordinary, are put to the center by examining the interpretations of phenomena, such as the so-called “Arab Spring”. This thesis is built on examining the unheard voices through examining the post-colonial critique. Brownlee and Ghiabi note that using these voices are important as the Western misinterpretations of the rest of the world continue to exist (p. 314.)

The post-colonial critique is mainly based on the concepts of Orientalism (Said, 1978) and Eurocentrism (Amin, 1989). These concepts serve as a base through which the representations of the so-called Arab Spring are looked at. The concepts are an important tool in raising up key issues that limit the analysis made by the grand narrative and how it is rooted in Eurocentric and orientalist foundations. The foundation makes visible the hegemony of the West in making the representations and shows that the analysis of the events of the so-called Arab Spring is based on Eurocentric and falsely universalistic ideals of western modernity and its ideals on politics and society.

### **5.1 Breaking the Eurocentric and orientalist foundation**

Dabashi (2012, p.15) sees that the Arab Spring and its effects are a sign of breaking the hegemony of the West, when talking about the narration of history. I read it to mean that what Dabashi calls the end of post-colonialism means that we need to reassess the way we look at history and especially the role of the West in shaping it. I will return to this question at the end of this chapter and in the conclusions of the thesis, but I will just

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<sup>4</sup> Used by Asef Bayat in *After the Arab Spring* (footnote in Brownlee & Ghiabi, 2016).

quickly mention that for me the most important question when trying to read the Dabashi's book "The Arab Spring- the End of Post-Colonialism" (2012) is that to whom he is writing. This comes mind especially when Dabashi talks of certain aspects of the agency and role of "the subaltern" in the discussion. Dabashi raises up the important issue that the subaltern can talk and already are active, but for me the important question is who listens? While the so-called Arab Spring has a role in breaking of the West's hegemony, the post-colonial theory seems to be an important frame to look the phenomenon from as in the overall discussion themes such as orientalism and eurocentrism are still framing the discussion. Although I wonder, maybe Dabashi is not writing those passages for me but for the subaltern? As to say, you do not need to wait for recognition from the West, you already have a voice. As such, I see that my role should then be to point out the sections of the discussion where the West neglects those voices and I hope that I am able to do this in this chapter of my thesis.

Magid Shihade (2012) has pointed out in their article is the use and role of modernity, eurocentrism and orientalism in the narration of the so-called Arab Spring, mainly in the Western perspective. As such, the main critique in of the narration of the so-called Arab Spring stems from the post-colonial theory by using and opening up the flaws when the viewpoint is Eurocentric and orientalist. This is connected to the way in which the West sees the societal development and how the modernity<sup>5</sup> of the West is seen as universal and the only valid model for development:

*This modernity as a thought and as a practice has created a feeling of ambiguity, of confusion about, and suspicion of the revolutions in the Arab world, as they are seen/perceived not free or disconnected but rather related to the western history of interventions, of mingling into the Arab World. Even those of us who support these revolutions cannot help but be disgusted at the practices and rhetoric of the West about these revolutions whether this is in Libya, Syria or anywhere else (Prashad, 2012, Haddad, 2012, Salt, 2012, Kanna, 2012). This is evident from the history of such interventions, as I will discuss later on in the paper, histories of western interventions whether in the Arab world or elsewhere, where western*

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<sup>5</sup> See also Ocalan (2011) on the notion of "democratic modernity", that challenges the western ideology of modernity

*thought and practice has been long applied on bodies and minds of people who became objects to western power, a form of thought terror that was matched by the terror of the guns that killed millions of peoples from around the non-Western world. (Shihade, 2012, p. 66.)*

Many of the critiques in this chapter follow in the footsteps of Said (1975), and Said's work on orientalism and othering. Key issue raised up by the critiques is that the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" are viewed from the western viewpoint and for western audiences building on orientalist stereotypes and representations.

### **5.1.1 The grand-narrative**

Rabab El-Mahdi (2011) talks about the "new grand-narrative that is being constructed by the media, academics, politicians and the local elite". While the new narrative seems to replace the notion of "Arab exceptionalism" that sees Arabs as "immune" to democracy, the same Orientalist bases of representation is used in the construction of the new narrative. El-Mahdi sees two "fundamental pillars" of Orientalist understandings of Arab societies based on 1) othering and 2) romanticization and exoticization. Othering sees They (Arabs or Muslims) as different from the Us (West) which is used as the normative standard. The second pillar sees this "oriental other" as mystical and mythical. According to El-Mahdi the new grand narrative used by academics and media is using the same pillars in appropriating, interpreting and representing the events of the so-called Arab Spring, and casting universalist-Eurocentric judgments. Cafnik Uludağ (2017) has also pointed out the eurocentric origins in the narratives especially in the global media. Cafnik Uludağ also sees that, these narratives contribute to the Eurocentric ideas of progress and modernity and as such makes the analysis of the so-called "Arab Spring" limited.

This universalist-Eurocentrism could be seen as the common theme in the critique of the narrative of the so-called Arab Spring. Within several different aspect can be seen and the grand notions (Eurocentric) of modernity, capitalism (in the neoliberal sense), democracy and human rights linger on the background. With them come the orientalist notions of the Arab World and the way West places itself into the center of the events.



One good example of this is the way the women rights have been discussed prior, during and after the events (Saleh, 2016).

The detailed issues and themes rising from the critique of the narrative on the so-called Arab Spring are introduced in more detail in the coming chapters, focusing on the two pillars presented above: Eurocentrism and Orientalism. Within the two pillars multitude of different detailed issues can be found, such as the othering and them-us divide, history of unequal power-relation and neglect of the agency of actor within the region as examples. Shadowing the discussion is the assumption that West and its history and social development can and should be seen as something that is universal and ideal.

Stefan Borg (2016) shows how Orientalism is part of the discourse in Western elite foreign policy and how the so-called Arab Spring is inserted into liberal civilizing narrative and emphasizes the “them-us” divide, in which human rights plays a critical moral role as a political tool, produces a universalistic Eurocentric vision of the narrative on the uprisings. In essence it sees Western experience of political and social change as something that can be produced everywhere and is universal:

*Here, human rights, the foundation of the liberal civilizational narrative, are little more than expressions of a particular Western experience disguised as universals. (Borg, 2016 p. 222.)*

Ventura (2017) writes that as the so-called Arab Spring is valued from a Western perspective as a dawn of a new era, seeing the Arab world as moving towards democratization, it is important to recognize this narrative as flawed and try to overcome these views to move beyond the Eurocentric narrative and towards more inclusive visions. In my view, this is essential as the Eurocentric vision of the so-called Arab Spring does not tell the whole picture and leads us into the same old views of the Arab world that no longer are valid, but rather are condescending and essentially racist.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Anibal Quijano (2007) for the construction of racial categories within the formulation of coloniality of power and Eurocentered capitalist domination of the world.

Rabab El-Mahdi (2011) points out that the grand-narrative with all its flaws tries to paint a picture, where only certain agency and actors are included and those who do not fit this picture are excluded:

*The “educated”, “Western” and “exposed” cosmopolitan Egyptians who are portrayed as sole agents of this “revolution” cannot torch police-stations, and those who did- the subaltern- should be and are excluded from the picture”*

*Once again we are witnessing the “empire” painting the picture of the “fringe” and within this fringe the subaltern- “the fringe of the fringe”- are being outcast.*

In their book “Demanding Dignity: Young Voices from the Front Lines of the Arab Revolutions” (2012) Maytha Alhassen and Shihab Eldin (p. xiii) point out that, while the so-called Arab Spring and the civil unrest that make with it, might have been a surprise for many in the West and elites in the Arab world, the people have been ready for change far longer. They also point out the hypocrisy of the US by pointing out that US had supported Hosni Mubarak (Egypt’s then president) for three decades with over billion dollars of military aid yearly for over three decades. So, Mubarak’s fall in eighteen days might have shocked the US, but the people of Egypt had been ready for it years. The West’s failure to predict or admit it is merely a sign of the neglect of the agency of the people in the region, in favor of supporting dictators for decades.

It is time that we, in the West, recognize the agency of the subaltern and I hope to show in the coming pages that when this is done, the world has a better chance to see actual change.

## **5.2 Eurocentrism**

At the center of the critique is the way the events of the "so-called Arab Spring" were and still are analyzed in the West, by western commentators from a western perspective. The Eurocentric view causes the events to be distorted and leads to certain aspects to be misunderstood. If, we look at the way the grand narrative looks at the events, it wanted to lead the discussion into the modernity and democratization of the Arab region, while the actuality may have been different. Essentially the eurocentrism in the discussion leads the local voices be dismissed or used only as a tool, which also causes the issues and themes to be dismissed or misused. The other side of eurocentrism is that while the West is at the center of the narration its role is seen as the leader and the history of colonialism and repression of the West in the region is not discussed. In the next chapters the different aspects of the Eurocentricity of the analyses is discussed in more detail.

Amin (2016) shows, that the end of colonialism actually created the expansion of the Eurocentric colonial or imperialistic capitalism that had a devastating impact on the Arab world also. Essentially the Arab world has to become part of the global movement that goes beyond the imperialistic capitalism on world scale (ibid, p 21, 43). Imperialistic practices of the West are not aimed for true transformation in the Arab region, rather they are in place to maintain the hegemony of the West (ibid, p. 14). Detailed analysis of the events is essential and as such the grand narrative on the so-called "Arab Spring" is hindering the efforts for true change (ibid p. 16).

### **5.2.1 West as the savior?**

Saleh's text (2016) gives a detailed example how the narrative produces the image of West as an epicenter of modernity and civilization through the narrative of Muslim women in need of empowerment as they called for their freedom as part of the actors in the so-called Arab Spring. Quoting Pratt (2013, in Saleh 2016) West is seen as the ideal on the women's political representation and mobilization. This produces a simplified image of the women's rights movements in the West. Savior narrative has a long history

and rise to the center in the narratives of the wars on terrorism, which produces the neo-orientalist image of women in the narratives of the so-called Arab Spring.

Nicola Pratt (2013) talks of how Western media's image of empowered revolutionary women is being overtaken by the victim of violence narrative, "many Egyptian women were appalled at Western media assumptions that they were "liberated" by the January 25 revolution". There is a long history of women's rights movements decades prior of the so-called Arab Spring, and this is being neglected by the Western narrative.

In addition to women's rights movements, other important social justice movements and actors within the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" were youth groups and labor movements. In Tunisia for example, the movements began as unorganized but were soon taken over by labor activists and unions. In Egypt the youth group April 6<sup>th</sup> movement was acting in solidarity with labor strikes in al-Mahalla al-Kubra in 2008. (Hanafi, 2015, p. 61.)

Soumaya Ghannoushi shows this in their text "Rebellion: Smashing stereotypes of Arab women" (2011) when she gives a voice to a senior activist Saida Saadouni, who took part in the Qasaba protests in Tunisia:

*I resisted French occupation. I resisted the dictatorships of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. I will not rest until our revolution meets its ends, for your sakes my sons and daughters, not for mine. (Ghannoushi, 2011.)*

### **5.2.2 Who looks and speaks?**

When looking at who speaks of and looks, in my thesis case, the events of the so-called Arab Spring, the important notion made by Dabashi (2012, p .154) is to recognize that the Oriental i.e. the people in the Arab region in this case, are always produced by the West as a contrast to the modern (read *the West*). What this means, in my mind and in regards of the question at hand is that the events are always valued in the West in contrast to what is seen as western modernity. There is also a power relation that values the West

as the one that is seen as the one doing the speaking and looking, and the Orientals are seen as objects. Cafnik Uludağ (2017) has also pointed out that in media it is the Eurocentric notions of progress and modernity that are imposed into the narratives.

Dabashi (2012, p. 32) also by using Hardt and Negri's work on social change in contemporary times as example shows that while I see that Hardt and Negri are doing valuable work in regards of modifying the way social change is seen, in some regards fall to same assumptions and claims that produce the image of West as the universal. In my mind this shows how the Eurocentricity has been so imbedded into the western society it is hard to overcome it.

Soguk (2011) questions the formulation of modernity, it has rather created hierarchy between humans, and should not be seen as only ideals and rights. In their view modernity can be seen as an example of the eurocentrism in the knowledge production.

AlMaghlouth, Arvanitis, Cointet & Hanafi (2015) show in their analysis of the academic texts produced of the so-called Arab Spring that knowledge of the events is mainly produced outside the region and inside knowledge is isolated from the mainstream discussion. Knowledge is mainly produced by US-based academics mostly in English. Of course, as also pointed out by AlMaghlouth et al (2015) there are academics text produced in other languages as well, and for example the French academia is also relevant when talking of Eurocentric representations.

Mona Abaza's text "Academic Tourists Sight-Seeing the Arab Spring" (2013) talks of the unequal academic relation between the "western experts and local informants" which produces the same subject-object dilemma that is highlighted by the formulations of orientalism. This raises the question of who speaks and of what. In theory there is no problem is using local informants, but as Abaza points out the problem comes when the relationship is unequal, and the informants are felt feeling "misused":

*There is much to say about the ongoing international academic division of labor whereby the divide between the so called "theoreticians" of the North and the "informants", who are also "objects of study" in the South continues to grow (Abaza, 2013).*

As Abaza's text (2013) together with the study of AlMaghlouth et al. (2015) shows that much needs to be done also inside the academic knowledge production in order to overcome the orientalist and Eurocentric production of knowledge.

Central to countering the grand narrative and its Eurocentric views is the recognition of the history of social movements in the region that spans over 100 years (*and beyond, I might add as it would be un-likely that Arab world would have been any different from the rest of the world*) prior to the so-called Arab Spring (Shihade, 2012).

Magid Shihade's important text "On difficulty in predicting and understanding the Arab Spring: Orientalism, Euro-Centrism, and Modernity" (2012) raises into the discussion many important notions of how there is a need to critically look the analyses that is being produced of the events. By using the theoretical background of orientalism, eurocentrism and critique of modernism, Shihade shows that the claims of universality produced in the analyses are connected to the idea of the need of modernizing the Arab world, produces a narrative where people's needs are seen as a potential danger (*to the hegemony of the West*) places the Western interests at the center, neglecting the aspirations and self-determination of the people. This produces the Eurocentric and essentially racist analysis of the so-called Arab Spring.

*...these dynamics are forms of interventions, in line with political, economic and military ones, that were imposed on the people of the region (the Arab world, and elsewhere in the Third World) for a long time. (Shihade, 2012, p. 67.)*

In addition, Shihade (2012) quotes Samir Amin and raises up the connection of the so-called Arab Spring and the history of colonialism of the region:

*...the Arab revolution must be seen as a part of the history and lineage of youth uprisings and revolutions in the region against colonialism and corrupt regimes in the postcolonial period, period that has been shaped by neocolonial global structure of domination of the West over the sane people they colonized directly earlier (Shihade, 2012, p. 67).*

#### 5.2.4 Academic Eurocentrism

Abaza (2013) gives an insight into the academic eurocentrism. As already noted in the previous chapter, the relations are based on un-even power relations, but it also produces a Eurocentric view as the “locals” are reduced to service providers. Abaza talks of the academics coming to “witness” the actual experience of Arab Spring, which is often actually reduced to few weeks of field-work. This has left the local academic community feeling “misused”. The motivation of the “Western tourist-revolutionary academics” is often misguided and is affecting the way events and people of the region are seen. This is what I have referred to as the grand narrative in this thesis and academic inequality feeds it, while producing and Eurocentric reading of the events and the region.

*...Many overnight Middle East experts show remarkable tendency to pursue sensational and market driven topics and readily switch interest as the market forces fluctuate. One day they are self-proclaimed experts on “Political Islam” or “Islam and gender” and another, they are authority on “the Arab Spring” and “pro-democracy revolutions”. This superficial and business-orientated handling of crucial developments and changes in the area affects how peoples of the region are perceived and how policies are shaped in the West (Abaza, 2013).*

Almaghlouth et al. (2015) have provided hard evidence of this, when they conclude that there is a hierarchy in the knowledge production, which causes Eurocentricity and leads to Western academics being seen as the leading authority on the events. This comes up when looking closely at some of the titles of the texts produced on the so-called “Arab Spring”. Titles such as “Common interest, closer allies, how democracy in the Arab states can benefit the West” show the problematic object-subject relation and the eurocentrism in the formulation of the research. As stated previously most of the texts on Arab Spring are being produced outside the Arab world by western academic in English. And I would add that mostly likely are produced to the sole purpose of the Western audiences and politics. As Almaghlouth et al. (ibid., p. 437) point out the International Relations academic community does not want to deal with the critical Arab voices and research from the region is notably absent. The disengagement from the local context, which according to them is amplified by the neoliberal interests and marginalization of the local

voices produces Eurocentric views on change and shows the evident power-relations in knowledge production. The amount of critical voices, that I have aimed to show in my thesis, is a clear sign that the reading of the so-called Arab Spring has been flawed from the start if the only focus is on the Eurocentric grand narrative. Saleh's (2016) analysis of the empowerment narrative reveals the flaws in what voices are brought into the discussion and paraphrases Spivak (1988) in their conclusions that "the subaltern (still) cannot speak". Essentially this means that West is seen as the subject (the one who speaks and studies) and East/Orient is seen as the object (the target of being talked of and studied) (Ventura, 2017, p. 285).

### **5.2.5 Turning the West into object**

*Of course, these experts failed to remember that the French Revolution, the most celebrated example of people's power to change history according to the Eurocentric historiography, took years to achieve some of its goals, later on to be hijacked by the dictatorship of Napoleon who led the same French people to wars against European powers and to colonize large parts of the world. The slogans of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" were soon after that forgotten and domination and genocides against peoples in the Third World became the norm of the French "Republic," and its legacy, and continues to be part and parcel of the French involvements in different parts of the world that is used for resources and hegemony. (Shihade, 2012, p. 60.)*

The quote from Shihade (2012) is for me an important reminder of time and how in the case of Arab Spring people in the West were and still are quickly casting judgments on whether or not the events produced any change. It also shows that changing a society is not something that happens quickly and there are many detours in can take. One might ask if the French revolution has achieved its goals, when looking at the political climate in France and Europe in general.



Hamid Dabashi (2012, p. 55-58) gives a compelling analysis of how eurocentrism has had a great role in narration of the history of the Arab region and how West has neglected its own colonial role in creating different dynamics within the region. This is done by neglectation of the effects of imperialism and colonialism and undermining the effects West has had in the region. Dabashi goes as far, and I would agree, that West and the Arab region have been intertwined for centuries and the falsely invented ideology of Western civilizational agenda should be seen mirrored by the Orient. There is no division and the West cannot act as only an outsider but must recognize its role within the region and the effects it has had on the region. While Dabashi (ibid, p. 75) argues that Arab Spring would mark the death of the myth of “a white man”, meaning the division between West and the rest, I wonder did it only make it visible and challenge the division. The imperial history of the West is also something that needs to be kept in mind as it has had a huge impact on shaping the region and on the societies that were affected by the so-called Arab Spring (ibid, p. 123).

Sedef Arat-Koc (2014) also points out to the “amnesia of West” in not recognizing its role in the history of shaping the dynamics of the Arab world<sup>7</sup>. Examples such as the relationship between the Islamist during the Cold War and recent alliances with the Islamist in the Middles East show that the popular understanding of world politics overlooks the role of the West. In addition, Soguk points out to the obvious failure of the Western notions of modernity in producing relevant development in the region.

Rami G.Khoury (2011) deepens this critique when they state that:

*Western powers for the past century and a half or so have assumed that they can shape and control most aspects of power and policy across the Arab world, whether due to imperial self-interest, energy requirements, economic needs, or pro-Israeli biases. As Arab citizens shed docility and threaten to take control of their own societies, many in the West are unsure how to deal with this possibility.*

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<sup>7</sup> Here I see, that the work of Jack Goody in “Theft of history” (2007) is an important tool to understand the “amnesia of West” and is a deeper analysis of how the West imposed its own narration of history.

As such, Khouri (2011) shows that West is not an outsider when it comes to the Arab region, and it has had a long impact. Khouri points out that if we (Western politicians and media) continue to speak of the region in terminology of referring to seasons (Spring) and see the region reflecting “winds and tides”, the people in the region cannot help but to see it no more than a reflection of the colonialism of the past centuries. The same language seems to define the way Arab region is seen in the Western powers.

Amin (2016) also raises up the issue of the role of the West in maintaining the capitalist system that came after the end of the colonial era. These practices maintain the political situation in the Arab region and as such the role of the West should be noted. (ibid, p. 231.)

#### **5.2.6 Agency**

*As one protester from that day put it: “The moment I chanted freedom was the moment I’d found my dignity.” (Jarrah, 2012, p. 63.)*

The neglected part of the grand narrative of the Arab Spring is the activist that were on the ground during the unrest of the so-called Arab Spring. Alhassen and Eldin (2012) have collected these stories into their book “Demanding Dignity: Young Voices from the Front Lines of the Arab Revolutions”. The stories show a different narration where people are and had been preparing for the protest for years and that they were actually ready to risk their lives for dignity, change. What is the most important part of the stories is that they also give an insight to the neglected parts of the so-called Arab Spring by also telling the stories of activist from for example Yemen and Bahrain, where the protesters were faced with greater resistance by the regime and lacked support and visibility in the West. Hamid Dabashi (2012, p. 77) has also pointed out similarly that the so-called Arab Spring is a sign of the subaltern speaking and loudly, Dabashi even question if they need representation by the West and as much I agree with their statement and agree that the voice of the subaltern was clearly shown by the multitude of people on the streets fighting for dignity and social justice, my only hesitation is did we in the West really listen?

The blatant orientalism and eurocentrism are at work, when defining the agency of the people within the region. In many ways the agency of the people is inserted to fit the grand narrative produced in West (Borg 2016) rather than seeing the actual agency of those involved. It could be said that in the grand narrative the actual change (whatever it means) comes from the West and not from the people in the Arab region.

*Not only Western thought and ideas helped the revolution according to this narrative, but also the power of western technology (the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, phone messaging...etc.), which supposedly shaped these revolutions. This is of course without any serious and critical study about the number/percentage of users, and as if without such technology, the revolution would not have happened, and which is also contradicts or evades the history of revolutions in the region that has been taking place there for decades without such technology. So, again, if any change takes place in the Arab world, it must be due to, influenced by, or aided by Western ideas, thought, and technology. Thus, according to this narrative, even if the events were not shaped by direct western intervention, they were shaped by these indirect tools. (Shihade, 2012, p.62.)*

The only agency that matters is the agency stemming from the West, it seems. AlMaghlouth et al. (2015) shows that Arab commentators put their emphasis on the social justice aspect of the events, which is often dismissed. Alhassen (2012) comments on the media depiction of the events as seeing Arab population being wakened up from their sleep, most notably by the term “Arab Awakening”. The terminology was used for example by The Economist in their cover of the summer-issue of 2009 that stated that the Arab world was “waking from its sleep”. These notions dismiss the agency of the people and reduce it into an orientalist stereotype, which is rebutted by the long history of disobedience in the region (see previous chapter). Alhassen (2012) and El-Mahdi (2011) point out to the same dynamic that Borg (2016) of making the agency fit into the narrative and ideals of the West:

*In Tunisia, I discovered youth activists strongly rebuffed another Western imposed phrase: the Jasmine Revolution. This was utterly insulting for those who actively sacrificed their livelihood and put their families in*

*danger to have their movement to overthrow Ben Ali. It was part of a fundamental step towards questioning how it we “here” speak of what is going on “over there.” (Alhassen, 2012.)*

The agency of the people is only relevant, it seems, when it fits into the narratives of the West.

Sari Hanafi’s (2012) article tries to highlight “the *people* in the popular slogan “the people want the fall of the regime”. As such it aims to show the actors involved in the revolution, Hanafi identifies the main actors to be the youth and labor movements. The article’s main point, in my mind, is to tell the story from the perspective of the actual actors of the revolutions and as such celebrates the agency of those involved. In doing so, Hanafi sees a new form of agency being formed. It is labeled by Hanafi as reflexive individualism to separate it from the neoliberal individualism. Reflexive individualism is

*...a type of individualism that involves the constant negotiation of an actor with the existing social structure in order to realize a (partial) emancipation from it. This is an act of self-reference of an agent that recognizes forces of socialization but alters his or her place in the social structure and resists their disciplinary power. (p.53.)*

As such this has not been recognized by the Western actors (such as NGOs etc.) and if we do not recognize these different forms of agency, our view of the so-called Arab Spring and of political change in the Arab region will not be complete.

The formulations of agency or lack of them in the grand narrative is part of the general Eurocentric and orientalist hegemony of seeing how change happens in the Arab World. Borg (2016) talks of how the universalistic ideas of social change serve as a guarantee for West to dictate what the Arab World wants. Hiding behind this ideology is the neglect of the agency of the Arab people and their ability to make their own history. (Shihade p. 59, also in Borg 2016.)

### 5.2.7 West as the (false) center

Central to the critique of the grand narrative is the notion that West is the center of the events and matters the most. It comes to realization when the only interests that matter are the Wests and as seen on the previous chapters, on who holds the agency and knows what should happen and how it should happen. It also means that the West's own development is the only "right" way and only end goal of social change. It also seems that when this does not come to reality in the way "the West" has planned or when it threatens the West's false position as the center (Shihade, 2012, p. 59), West seems to neglect the movements:

*Many quarters of many Western lands remain hesitant in fully acknowledging – let alone embracing or supporting – the implications of free Arabs pursuing self-determination who have the power to define their countries and shape their national policies.*

*Western powers for the past century and a half or so have assumed that they can shape and control most aspects of power and policy across the Arab world, whether due to imperial self-interest, energy requirements, economic needs, or pro-Israeli biases. As Arab citizens shed docility and threaten to take control of their own societies, many in the West are unsure how to deal with this possibility.*

*Perhaps some in the West also do not want to acknowledge the full reality of Arabs reconfiguring their power structures, because Western powers (including Russia) supported those old, failed authoritarian systems that are now being challenged and changed. (Khoury 2011.)*

Alhassen & Eldin (2012, p. xii-xv) also pointed out the fact that much of the events of Arab Spring were due to the fact that people in region were not content with the fake progress of democracy promoted by the West as social justice and opportunities in the region were actually declining. The role of the West was questioned and the narrative of West as the example and promoter of democracy was clearly challenged.

### 5.2.8 Western interest at the center

As can be seen from the previous chapters, it seems, that that matters the most when analyzing and discussing the events and impact of the so-called “Arab Spring” are the Western interests. What happens when putting the western interest into the center is that at the same time the “people’s needs and aspirations and their self-determination” is neglected and put aside as marginal or even irrelevant. (Shihade, 2012, p. 59) As this happens and the Western interest is used as the starting point for understanding of the events, the representations get manipulated and distorted. As seen on the agency-chapter there is also a tendency to only include those that have been influenced by the West.

*Thus, the struggles of peoples in the South seem to continue to be ignored, manipulated to fit western interests, or when impossible it is maligned as work of “fanaticism.” When it manages to overcome local, regional, and global restraints and succeeds, than these struggles are celebrated to be co-opted as the work of “Western influence. (Shihade, 2012, p. 61.)*

The western influences also shape the discussion, as they determine how the events and issues are framed and from what perspective (i.e. the West’s). It also influences the way things are discussed as it influences what is raised into the discussion (and more importantly, what is left out). As seen on the previous chapters the gaze is of the West and not the Arab worlds (Alhassen, 2012). Shihade (2012) points out also that this is not a new phenomenon but rather continues the history of the Western interventions that exploit and hinders the development of the Global South.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it leads to the West being ignorant and misunderstanding of the developments in the Arab region, which makes the situation unpredictable (ibid, p. 61). What is most disturbing is that we do not see the potential of these events and of the people in the region but continue to fall back to the same misguided notions of the Arab region, just because we cannot put our own interest aside.

*In the many reports, talks, and conferences, ad or papers about the Arab revolution, old orientalist and neo-orientalist narratives and perspectives*

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<sup>8</sup> See also, Prashad (2017) for a deeper analysis of the impact of that Prashad calls imperial practices on the Global South.

*continue to present the Arab world as either; dangerous, chaotic, and violent, or; stagnant, passive, and always in need for help from the outside (from the West), which mirrors the official discourse of Western governments. (Shihade, 2012, p. 60.)*

As the El-Mahdi (2011) quote on the first chapter of this thesis pointed out, there is a way in which the agency of the people is portrayed, as only relevant when it fits the Western narrative, which excludes those who does not fit into it. What happens is that West is put to the center and those who are deemed as similar to the West or pursuing the same (*false*) ideals are celebrated (*or rather are deemed worthy of the celebration*). As can be read not so between the lines, is the critique of seeing the Western values as universals and noting the needs of the people only relevant when they fit these ideals. In many critiques of the Western narrative, one central argument is that while the calls for social justice may seem echoing the same ideals, they are not completely same. For example, Hanafi (2012, p. 58) found out that the motivation stems from necessity rather than ideology or political, which also shows real commitment to the calls for social justice. This also connects to what Sedef Arat-Koc (2014, p. 1659) has found in the formulation good Muslim versus bad Muslim<sup>9</sup> used in the foreign policy of the US in the region. Good Muslim here is seen as a moderate and compatible with US interests. Arar-Koc also, referencing to Mamdani (2004), points out that “not only is the distinction in the West between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims a political one, but the very emergence of political Islam as a global phenomenon is itself the outcome of a modern encounter with the West.”

Borg (2016) critiques the notion all together and shows when trying to make sense of the Western responses to the events it seems that discursive representation of the events is what matters. Borg sees that in the Western narrative the events of “Arab Spring” are manifestations of liberal democracy and human rights. Central to the argument is that these should and can be seen as universals and states that there is no difference between the West and the Arab region. I would like to point out that in my mind I read this as a statement of not dismissing the value of human rights or social justice but rather as a critique of using them as a political tool. I hope I am not distorting the argument of Borg too much. This universalism places West into the center and sees that only thing Arab

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<sup>9</sup> Firstly, formulated by Mahmood Mamdani (2004) in Good Muslim, Bad Muslim.

World wants is to enter an already defined model of Western modernity (the connection is most visible when mirroring it with the term Awakening). In this narrative the West holds the control and knows what should happen as the West is the (*false*) ideal. Central to this narrative is the liberalizing mission of the West, where the human rights narrative plays a critical role (Borg 2016).

### **5.2.9 Who and what is seen as “the change”?**

*Theories of social movements and revolutions/change, including Marxist approaches, continue to dominate Western academy and knowledge production, including academics and intellectuals in the non-western world. These theories are seen as universal and are applied to studying societies around the world. These objectified societies, thus serve only as recipients of theoretical interventions, they serve as a laboratory of western-centric thought and theorizing. According to this approach, change, and revolutions must happen according to these theories, and if they don't, than they are not considered revolutions nor evidence of a change. (Shihade, 2012, p. 63-64.)*

Hamid Dabashi (2012 p. 63) talks of the so-called Arab Spring as an “open-ended revolt” that can challenge the Eurocentric ideals of that revolts are and as such the language of social change needs to be renewed. This means that the “concepts, ideas aspirations and imagination” of the “revolutions” is changing. What I see as important is that the labels might not be so important, whether the so-called Arab Spring is revolution or aimed for democracy is not important, what is that it is recognized as event that produced social change, whether or not we value it here in the West. The Eurocentric ideals are no longer relevant, but the way we talk about them are. Brownlee and Ghiabi (2016, p. 305-310) have also noted that the language of revolts is used differently in Arabic and in the Western tradition. In my mind this calls for new definitions of what change means.

As noted already above, it seems that the Eurocentric notions lead to a false universality where West is seen as the standard and the history of movement and the agency of the



people in Arab region is neglected. Hanafi (2012, p. 41) claims that the whole of the so-called “Arab Spring” should be seen “as continuities of a long history of protest in the region rather than a total rupture”. What this shows to us is that while the totality of the events of the so-called “Arab Spring” can be seen as something sudden and unforeseen, there is an underlying neglect of recognition of the calls for social and democratic demands of the past in the region. Hanafi (ibid, p. 41) gives an example of protest in Tunisia three years before the so-called “Arab Spring” on bread prices and unemployment. Similarly, in 2009 a group of Tunisian bloggers and Facebook users called for release of political prisoners and demanded freedom of expression. And it should be noted that the recent examples used by Hanafi are just a glimpse to a long history of protests and movements in the region going back decades and shows to us that whatever the so-called Arab Spring is, it is not a political awakening of the people in the region, they have been awake for decades.

Before moving into the second aspect of the post-colonial critique I have identified, Orientalism, I think it is important to raise up the notion of what in Western sense is seen as the ideal development and end goal. This relates to the notions of the Orient which will be discussed more detail in the following chapters. Ventura (2017) shows that the underlying orientalism in the narratives, which builds on stereotypes and abstractions leads to an ethnocentric approach that adopts the Eurocentric idea of western modernity and democracy as a measure of progress. This view sees the West as the standard for development and is highly connected to the defining of West as modern (i.e. active) and the Orient as passive (ibid, p. 289). Ventura gives women’s rights as a great example of which shows the orientalism and eurocentrism at play in the Western narration, this will also be discussed in more detail on the following chapters on the Orientalism in this thesis.

The important question now, it seems is to look at what is defined as democracy and how it affects the narration of the so-called “Arab Spring”. Ventura (2017) shows that the discussion on the compatibility of the Arabs and democracy is based on the essentialist and ethnocentric viewpoint and leads to culturalistic generalizations. As such it leads to the question what is democracy and who defines it? Essentially it seems that the West is in role of both being the example and definition of democracy. This flawed view of democracy leads to a simplistic and narrow narration of the events of the so-called “Arab Spring” and partly is the reason behind the current narrative on the failure of the events.

What it shows most importantly is that the Arab World is still seen as the “subaltern” and the orientalism and eurocentrism of the narration by the West:

*Orientalist images and ideas are linked to a context made of concrete economic and strategic interests and of power relationships between hegemonic and subaltern cultures. Therefore, these reflections about the persistence of Orientalism also make clear that the conditions that are the basis of the Orientalist approach persist. Arab countries still have strategic economic and political importance and they remain “subaltern”. (Ventura, 2017, p. 296.)*

Amin (2016) has also noted this and sees that what is needed is to recognize the democracy as political rather than social (ibid, p. 8). This is the central challenge of our age (ibid, p. 16).

### **5.3 Orientalist stereotypes in general**

Malak & Salem (2015) see, that within the Middle-East studies, often claiming to be critical and post-orientalist, are not actually performing it in actuality. They connect this to the neoliberalization of the region. Neoliberalism has, as they state, always had a role in shaping the region and its politics (p. 104). The orientalist and Eurocentric notions affect the power agenda setting after the events of the so-called “Arab Spring” through post-colonial interventions.

Layla Saleh (2016) gives insides to what they call a neo-orientalist biopolitical construction of Muslim women and how the calls for empowerment especially in the US foreign policy reduces the agency of Muslim women involved in the revolutions. They remain as something the West needs to save or be taught by to despite their actions during the uprisings. This narrative is part of the orientalist stereotypes produced in the narratives of the so-called Arab Spring.

This argument is continued by Pratt (2013), in the formulation of “the gender paradox”, where the narration is reduced to resistance/domination, which does not give a full

understanding of the agency of women but rather reduces it to the orientalist stereotype. For example, they give a description of two different activists (the case of Alia El-Mahdi as fitting into the narrative of barbaric Muslim men versus the Samira Ibrahim's views and presentations in the West) and the ways these have been perceived in the Western narrative:

*This episode illustrates how Western recognition of Muslim women's agency is contingent upon her representing resistance to the barbaric Muslim man and not the barbarism of the West and its allies. (Pratt, 2013.)*

Ghannoushi (2011) talks about the orientalist myth of Arab women as being caged in, silenced and invisible that is being challenged by the women taking part in the revolution. But the question remains, are these stories part of the grand narrative, I would argue, echoing Pratt on previous chapter that they are not.

One example is the stereotype on headscarf, which is associated with "passivity, submissiveness and segregation<sup>10</sup>". This is being challenged by the women among the resistances, who choose to wear the veil. For Ghannoushi (2011) they are "expression of the complex interplay of Muslim culture", which is neglected by the orientalist stereotypes:

*The other view is espoused by Euro-American neoliberals, who view Arab and Muslim women through the narrow prism of the Taliban model: Miserable objects of pity in need of benevolent intervention from intellectuals, politicians, or even the military. Arab women await deliverance from the dark cage of veiling to a promised garden of enlightenment.*

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<sup>10</sup> The headscarf is a contested topic and for many it is a symbol of Salafism and political Islam and for example in Egypt the protest was in some ways hijacked by members of these groups. The reason I am not taking part in this discussion is that, as a white non-muslim man it is not my place to control what women choose to wear. As pointed out by Ghannoushi (2011), for some hijab is a choice and many hijab wearing women were at the center of the protests of the so-called Arab Spring and are not salafists. See also for example Iranian women with hijabs showing solidarity to those opposing the veil laws in Iran (Amnesty International, 2019).

Orientalism is not only done by the West, but also by Arabs themselves use the language of orientalism, when they do not see themselves as makers of their own history. This is what Shihade calls Self-Orientalism (2012, p. 63) and it caused either by the imbedded view of weakness and/or due to the power of West and the technology produced in the West. This leads to the events of the so-called Arab Spring to be seen as merely the making of the West. For me this notion tells that orientalism is a discourse that has effects on everyone whether you are the one being stereotyped or the one in power.

Orientalism is deeply connected to West's formulation of modernity and the attempts to westernize the world (Dabashi, 2012, p. 84). The narration of the so-called Arab Spring has been affected by blatant orientalism and even racist views of the Arab region, Dabashi (p. 26-27) gives an example of Bernard Lewis's text, where they conceptualize the calls for democracy as something unimaginable for Arab people.

### **5.3.1 Othering and Them-Us divide**

The underlying tone that underpins the Orientalizing of the so-called Arab Spring rest on the formulation of othering in which the division between "them" i.e. the Arabs or Muslims are seen as different from the "Us" i.e. the West. In the creation of the divide the West and specifically the Europeans and their models of transformation are seen as the "normative standard" (El-Mahdi, 2011). This echoes throughout the analysis and affects even the way in which the event is named or who are seen as the actors within the different movements (example Shihade 2012 p xx.). As El-Mahdi (2011) points out it distorts the way we read the events and the way actors are included. Essentially the agency of the Arab world is robbed by the West when we only see their actions using methods and ideologies interpret as "Western":

*The underlying message here is that it these "middle-class" educated youth (read: modern) are not "terrorists," they hold the same values as "us" (the democratic West), and finally use the same tools (Facebook and twitter) that "we" invented and use in our daily-lives. (El-Mahdi, 2011.)*

Brownlee and Ghiabi (2016, p. 308-314) have also talked of this construct and show how the division is being constructed by the different categories and meaning given. As such, they also raise up the issue of being dislocated from the local places in academic research. More importantly they raise up the issue, that the movements of Arab Spring show similarities with movements in the West, such as the Indignados in Spain and protests in Greece. As such, they seem to be breaking the them vs. us division, but it is not without problems.

*What does this 'dignity' ultimately signify? The concept seems to unfold common contradictions, aspirations and struggles in the West as in the East. Hence, how to integrate these phenomena across social, cultural and economic localities, into a unique, yet dynamic, global scholarship? (Brownlee and Ghiabi, 2016, p. 314.)*

That the so-called Arab Spring does is that it challenges the divide and makes it more nuanced (Hanafi, 2012, p. 59). While in my mind it is also still very much focused on the binary of East vs. West, there were moments where this binary was more nuanced, and it seemed we were moving beyond it. On the other the nuanced otherness was not only moving beyond the binary but also making other divisions inside the societies and as El-Mahdi (2011) pointed out it also was used to hijack the agency of the Arab people.

Cafnik Uludağ (2017) also points out that othering is not only made by small isolated group, but it is rather incorporated into the everyday communications:

*As such the politics of othering not only manifest themselves as an isolated set of neo-conservative beliefs behind foreign policies, on the contrary, the politics of othering are still very much present in everyday communications. (Cafnik Uludağ, 2016, p. 214.)*

The same othering had a role also in the construction of the Muslim women in need of empowerment, introduced in the previous chapter, as part of the US foreign policy in silencing the agency of the Muslim women. In other words, the agenda rest on the construction of the division, for in order of the foreign powers to be able to empower.

### 5.3.2 Passivity

Rami G. Khouri (2011) talks of the orientalism hiding on the naming of the event as Spring is something associated with being passive, which is rooted in the stereotypes produced by orientalism in formulation of the political and social change in the Arab World:

*I suspect that the popularity of the “Arab Spring” term across the Western world quietly mirrors some subtle Orientalism at work, lumping all Arabs as a single mass of people who all think and behave the same way.*

Continuing with the same theme Alhassen (2012) makes a notion of the orientalism in the naming of the event and how it reflects the orientalist approach to the region. Alhassen shows in their article, that the term Arab Spring in itself is a revealing of the problems in the narration of the events. Alhassen calls for a critical examination on the way “we in the West” describe the events. The term has many limitations such as the how it neglects the non-Arab ethnic groups involved in the movements. The term also neglects the history of activism in the region. More importantly Alhassen points out that Arab Spring is not a term used by those who were involved in them. While the term Spring is problematic, even more so is the notion of awakening that can be seen as an orientalist notion that neglects the past movements in the region. The term is an example of the way the grand narrative of the events is created by the West and how it neglects the voices within the movements. The Western invention shows that “*we still continue to see the Arab region in our eyes and not through theirs*”. Alhassen found that terms such as dignity (karama) and revolution or revolutions (thawra or thawrat) are the ones that are used by the activist themselves. As such the notion of revolution in relation to the events have been criticized, mostly by Eurocentric notions of what revolution has been in the past, but it is a term used within the movements and should not be neglected.

Saleh’s argument shows that the persistence of the neo-orientalist image of Muslim women in need of empowerment shows that the narratives produce a simplified image of a complex issue. The image cannot be produced to either Muslim women as in need of empowerment by the West or as naïve assumption that so-called Arab Spring and women actors in it have forged their self-liberation. That the simplification, made through the

persisting neo-orientalist notions, does is that it may overlook, muffle or distort the goals and insistences of the revolutions (Saleh, 2016). But, as Ghannoushi (2011) points out, one thing is clear, the different rebellions and resistance are now “part of the psyche and formative culture of Arab women”. This has produced a new generation of future leaders that continue to fight for “liberation from authoritarianism- both political and patriarchal”, regardless of how we perceive them in the West.

False Western media narratives equating women’s agency with women’s liberation and then turning it into the narration of revolution threatening women’s rights could be seen as sign of imposing the modernity and marks the orientalist vision of Muslim/Arab woman as victim and how West understands the Arab world (Pratt, 2013).

### **5.3.3 Simplification of the image**

*In my discussion so far, I have tried to push for acknowledging the complexity of human history, Arab history, western interventions, and the effect of "knowledge" such as Orientalism, and western-centric approaches to theory of change, and modernity, complicated history between its claims and reality of its practices. I suggested that these dynamics are forms of interventions, in line with political, economic, and military ones, that were imposed on the people of the region (the Arab world, as elsewhere in the Third World) for a long time. (Shihade, 2012, p. 68.)*

Shihade (2012, p. 68) aims to show that what is missing in the grand narrative is the room for complexity due to fact that there is no room for alternatives outside the Eurocentric representations. The grand narrative, that is at the center of the post-colonial critique employed at this thesis and through-out the articles analyzed, is based on the Eurocentric and orientalist simplification of the events. It aims to frame the events of the “so-called Arab Spring” into a narrow frame that fits the ideals and goals of the West. Following Ventura (2017, p. 285-286), the orientalism, which produces one grand picture of a large wave of change in the region, overlooks the social, political and cultural differences between the different countries. As a result, certain aspects, such as religion, are deemed unfit in the narration, as it does not fit into the story of modernity imposed by the West.

As such the grand narrative plays on the simplification of before and after, before being the orientalist image of backwardness and inefficiency and after the modernity, as perceived by the West (ibid, p. 295).

According to Hanafi (2012, p. 39-40) the analysis produced in the West, that is marked by orientalist notions of the region, do not capture the totality of the events. They may be helpful if we look at the change on smaller scale, locally (from a western perspective, I may add), but they fail to look at the events on a grander scale. What Hanafi (ibid, p. 47-49) point out that only looking at the “micro-transformations”, the connection between legal and political and role of state is overlooked. Essentially the role of authoritarianism is dismissed when the only level of analysis is the Eurocentric notion of moving towards modernity (i.e. democracy etc.). The totality of transformation needs to be looked at from multiple levels, not just from the Western perspective. The complexity of an authoritarian regime must be recognized and the different levels, as mentioned before, needs to be included if we want to get the full picture. The same problem was found by AlMaghlouth, Arvanitis, Cointet & Hanafi (2015), when they looked at the academic literature produced of the so-called “Arab Spring”. Articles mainly discuss Arab World in general, with few exceptions focusing on single cases. This leads to generalizations and reduces the analysis to the neoliberal interests and producing only one narrative for change, while marginalizing the local voices.

The western perspective of looking at the so-called Arab Spring is the main driver behind the simplification of the events, while on surface the aims and slogans of the events main seem similar, the West tries to reduce the narrative to fit the story of moving towards modernity and represent them only from the Western perspective (Ventura, 2017, p. 285-286):

*When watching the demonstrations and their slogans, they all seem similar and appear to share the same aims, but when considering the deep social, political and even cultural differences between Arab countries, it is very difficult to believe in the representation of a single Arab revolution.*

Alhassen & Shihab Eldin (2012), have shown by introducing the stories on the ground, that while the so-called Arab Spring caused monumental changes to the society and



politically, the transition was far from simple. After the events the activists were faced with a changed situation and for example in Tunisia, the campaigning for the elections was a changed climate for the activist of the movements of the so-called Arab Spring:

*Later another friend, Sami, described our struggle: “Yasmin, we are defying power— social and political. We are now moving against the current.” He was right. The revolution was the outburst of an anti-movement, but then the storm calmed down and normalcy took over again. The revolution became part of the system instead of remaining a power outside of it that could defy, challenge, and ultimately change it. Politicians took over. Old discourses ignited from within the old corrupt system framed the everyday, and in the name of our revolution, we Tunisians were now protecting what, months ago, we were fighting.*

*Yet those who were now standing up again were re-igniting the fire of revolution. We were fighting against the system. The positive aspect of what could be otherwise interpreted as a sad end is that those who are fighting the corrupt system are back at the margins, where every revolution starts. (Haloui, 2012, p. 87)*

Essentially the so-called Arab Spring must be seen as a one moment within the frame of change, not as the actual change itself. There was and still is a lot of work to be done. As such the simplified narration is an obstacle that much be overcome in order to recognize the people on the ground fighting for change and their work must be recognized and supported.

#### **5.4 Romantification of the image**

As I have pointed out in the previous chapters, it is clear that much of the narration on the so-called Arab Spring, has been resting in the flawed pillar of eurocentrism and orientalist notions of the Arab region. What I have not yet addressed is the seemingly naïve and positive notions that saw the so-called Arab Spring as a celebration of universalistic

values. These “universal” values are imposed mostly from a Western perspective and are as I hope to have pointed out not really universal but rather imposing the Western agenda of modernity. As such these notions while they gave some recognition to the people and their agency, rest on the same Eurocentric and orientalist notions of the region.

Sedef Arat-Koc (2014) points out that the both sides, that they call Islamophobic and -philic tendencies, both reduce to the same culturalist and orientalist views on their analysis of the so-called Arab Spring. Essentially even the well-meaning and seemingly supportive views on the Islamophilic narrative, where the Arab world is not seen as incapable of change, fall victim to the same orientalist assumptions and end up placing the West as a model and center.

Ventura (2017) calls for the recognition of the flawed analysis where the movements of the so-called Arab Spring are reduced only to a dawn of a new era and are valued on the West only as movements towards democracy. This narration needs to be overcome for us to fully understand the so-called Arab Spring.

Alhassen & Eldin’s (2012) collection of the stories from the ground show that there was a lot of violence and resistance from the regimes, even to absurd level. What I am trying to emphasize here is that while the so-called Arab Spring was successful in toppling some regimes the transition during the fall and after is far from simple, and the romanticized narration of the movements does only harm the aims.

## **5.5 Key themes from the critique**

*These stories of our fellow global citizens— chants, cries, and songs proclaimed from rooftops far away— continue to be heard to this day through this book. They point to a vision of pan-Arab identity, expressed in their shared spirit and connected struggles. Their voices together culminate in a call for contesting political, religious, and conventional authority. Yet perhaps the most revolutionary of their demands is for the principle that*

*undergirds democracy everywhere: for karama, dignity. (Alhassen & Eldin, 2012, p. xxvii.)*

*The message is now clear: citizens of the Arab world are no longer to be feared by the West, just as they no longer fear their own leaders or shy away from the right to practice free speech. New generations of Arabs are reclaiming what it means to be Arab. Through the democratization of media and technology— specifically new disruptive publishing platforms and social media— this connected generation of Arabs has found power in numbers online and ways to translate those numbers into the streets. (Alhassen & Eldin, 2012, p.xvi)*

The analyses of the different text show that, while so-called Arab Spring is much talked in different contexts, the mainstream analysis produced fail to recognize the complexity of the events. The mainstream analysis reduces the complexity simply because it is done from Eurocentric and orientalist viewpoint and assumptions.

Magid Shihade (2012, p. 60) talks in their article about how many (*I might add western*) experts while claiming to sympathize the Arab people's struggles, started to make early on judgments and rather than seeing that "something is in the making" saw something that ended. The self-claimed experts on Arab revolutions were, in Shihade's and my opinion, too quick on their judgments and failed in patience to wait for the long-run impact. This, like Shihade shows with the example of the French revolution, which might not have fulfilled its goals even in the present day, shows that with transformations as big as the so-called Arab Spring, there are no quick results and things might end up going into unexpected ways. Shihade concludes by stating that clearly in play are the different forms of colonial structures that are replaced in modern day by "neo-colonial structures of domination and exploitation".

By raising into discussion, the critical viewpoints, that stem from post-colonial theory or can be read through post-colonial thought, I hope to diversify the discussion and highlight the much-neglected perspective when discussing the so-called Arab Spring. In this chapter I will draw together different aspects and look in more detail of the critical texts for future analysis. I will use these notions as base to look what the future research could

and should look like when we take into account the different critical notions raised in this chapter. My viewpoint is that there are a lot of tools to break the coloniality and universal assumptions made by scholars based in the West.

If we look closely, the main message that can be drawn from the critique, especially when looked at from a post-colonial theory perspective, is that there is a clear need for new narratives and for new ways of looking at how we, in the West, perceive the Arab region and in general our position and role on global scale in terms of political and social change. The critical texts point out clearly that no longer can the viewpoint be narrowed to Eurocentric notion of the West as “the ideal” and “the center”.

### **5.5.1 The West as “universal” standard**

As many of the texts have shown one of the main arguments in the critique of the narration on the so-called Arab Spring is that it seems to be done predominantly from Western perspective by placing the social values of the West at the center and seeing them as universal.

The West as the universal standard must be understood as a continuation of the analysis being made mainly from Western viewpoint. As such the Eurocentric notions of modernity and the way West as a society has developed is seen as the only model (see for example Shihade 2012). Saleh (2016) has pointed out by using the role of women in the discussion, that the ideals of West narrate the discussion and how different actors and events are seen. Khouri (2011) raises up the point that the normalized power-relations, that see West as the ideal affect also the way the events of the so-called Arab Spring are seen and how the West reacted to them. El-Mahdi (2011) deepens this by pointing out that the agency of people is valued by how they fit into the West’s narration and ideals. Borg (2016) talks of how in fact the narrative is constructed based on the western ideals of liberal democracy and human rights-agenda, which actually neglects certain aspects of the events. I have concluded in my analysis that the ideals might be seen as valuable, but the problem lies in using them as political tools.

Dabashi in their book “The Arab Spring- the end of Post-Colonialism” (2012) shows in many ways that there is a process of breaking the ideology that places the West at the center and simultaneously divides the world into “the West and the Rest.” Dabashi also talks of ways of decolonizing theory and the role of academia is at the center of this process. This in my mind requires us to carefully look at the ways we look at theory and how coloniality affects the research processes. More importantly, I think we need to always keep in mind from what viewpoint research is done and what voices are present and how they are reproduced and represented.

Just as important is the presentation and the different narratives that are produced. While at first, as already discussed, the initial narratives seemed to reverse some of the stereotypes that stemmed from the Eurocentric and orientalist assumptions, these eventually seemed to fall into familiar pitfalls. While trying to avoid Eurocentrism and Orientalism, the pursuit of authenticity may lead into re-orientalization of the Middle East. As Sedaf Arat-Koc (2014 p. 1662-1665) points out whilst producing these seemingly neutral presentations, there is a danger of re-orientalization. For example, Arat-Koc (ibid) shows that in some cases when rejecting the Eurocentric notions of democracy might lead to a form of essentialism where limited versions of democracy are deemed “good enough” for the Orientals.”

### **5.5.2 Orientalist stereotypes and othering**

When placing the West at the center and as a universal standard, it seems to lead into Orientalist stereotypes of the region and simplified images of the events and Arab people. There is a clear power unbalance that produces a narration where the West is seen as the universal, which overlooks the impact of the Arab region and its people, while neglecting the role of the West in shaping the regions history (see for example Arat-Koc, 2014 and Khouri, 2011). Dabashi (2012, p. 84) pointed out that the orientalist stereotypes are connected to the West’s formulation of modernity (and as such as talked on the previous chapter, how West is seen as the universal standard).

Ghannoushi (2011) gives an example of how some protestors' choice of using the veil and how it impacted the way they were seen in Western media is a manifestation of the orientalist stereotypes asserted into the Arab society. Pratt (2013) also talks of this when they point out the "gender paradox" that reduces the role of women into the resistance/ domination. This reduces the agency of women into orientalist stereotypes and does not give full credit to the active role of women within the events of the so-called Arab Spring.

The other has always been the one through which the West defines itself. The other is something different, something that is not the West:

*The "modern" West defines itself through opposition to the "other", or through an abstract consideration of the non-western world. In this pattern, the image of the "other" is built through oppositions to the West, which represents the "self", the hegemonic centre; in this way the "other" is marginalized and differences and nuances are disregarded in favour of a black-and white view and a simplistic approach. The representation of the recent revolts in the Arab world as one large wave of change is an example of generalization. (Ventura, 2017, p. 285.)*

El-Mahdi (2012) talks also of how the agency of people is reduced by this divide and are seen only when they fit into the Western ideals, i.e. the agency is valued on how well it fits into the West's values and how they manifest. In other words, actions are only valued, when they are seen as manifesting the ideals of West (i.e. the "Us" in them-us divide)

Dabashi (2012 p. 129-130) sees that as the so-called Arab Spring inspired movements around the globe, even in Europe and US, it can be seen as a sign of neoliberal policies that affect global patterns. For Dabashi this also means that the West and the Rest (i.e. the process of othering) is no longer valid as a binary category. As such, I also agree that the world cannot no longer be divided into the binary where everything is defined by seeing West as the superior and others as something else i.e. "inferior" or "passive".

### **5.5.3 The neglected agency of the people**

While talking about the critique presented in this chapter, in my opinion the most important thing that needs to be highlighted is, that when we look things from the Western perspective and reproduce a simplified image, that reduces the Arab people into orientalist stereotypes, we also neglect and simplify the agency of the people that we involved and made the so-called Arab Spring happen. The agency and will of the people involved, and those who risked and lost their lives when fighting for karama, dignity. If and when, this is reduced to simplified stereotypes and always in need of Western support and guidance, emphasis on the guidance, we in my mind, dishonor the bravery of the people involved. Especially, when we overlook the role of women and their involvement in the movements, they surely do not need white men to tell them how and what to do. It is time to break the idea that West knows best. While Western support might be needed, it cannot be a western dominated intervention, where the idea is that we in the West know what needs to be done and how to get there.

AlMaghlouth et al. (2015) analysis of the different academic texts produced the so-called Arab Spring show that there is a difference in what is valued based on the background of the writer. The Arab background commentators put more emphasis on social justice than their Western counterparts Borg (2016) also points out the fact that agency is made to fit the ideals and narrative of the West. Hanafi (2012) tries to give more insight into the agency of people by raising up the role of youth and labor right movement. Alhassen & Eldin (2012) have also collected the stories from the ground which raise up different issues in regards of the agency that the grand narrative. These stories show that the agency cannot be reduced into the Western ideals and the people of the Arab region were the ones risking their lives and making regimes fall down. The West's neglect of the agency and the false assumption that Arab people do not have the ability to make their own history (Shihade, 2012, p. 59) must end. The Arab people have shown that they are active long before the events of the so-called Arab Spring, and the events highlighted their ability, so we in the West must recognize it. As Dabashi (2012, p. 77) writes the so-called Arab Spring was an event where the subaltern spoke loudly.

Soumaya Ghannoushi's text (2011) on the role of women within the Arab revolutions shows that Arab women are crafting their own destinies and revolutions are now part of

the psyche and formative culture of Arab women. “The long-silenced (but not silent!) yearnings for liberation from authoritarianism” both political and patriarchal, are now raised up by and given voice by the Arab women<sup>11</sup>, all we need to do is to listen.

#### **5.5.4 Post-colonial theory as a tool**

What I have hoped for in this chapter is to show that the post-colonial theory and its concepts are useful framework and a tool to highlight certain flaws when narrating social change in the Global South; in my case in the narration of the so-called Arab Spring. By acknowledging the flaws and ideology behind them, I think we in the West can learn to break the legacy of imposing a Western centric perspective, agenda and values as universals, and make the narration and the actual processes of social change more inclusive and then move beyond colonialism and the claims of Western values as universals.

Hamid Dabashi (2012, p. 122) concludes, when analysis the so-called Arab Spring, that transnational solidarity calls for new ways of how to read the emerging realities. For me, this means that we in the West need to re-think the way we look and read into different social movements outside Europe (and within also). Dabashi (2012, p. 63-64) also notes that Arab Spring could be seen as a tool to rethink the ideas of democracy and revolution and a tool to overcome the orientalist and Eurocentric ideas as noted in this chapter of the thesis. Abaza (2013) notes also that Arab Spring could (and should) be seen as an opportunity, as there were and is potential in the attention. I hope that the themes I have raised up in this thesis are a continuation on giving positive attention and looking the events of the so-called Arab Spring from different angle. By doing this we can move beyond the grand narrative and look into the future where certain events and regions are not analyzed as subordinates to the West. This, as Dabashi noted, calls for a new way of reading certain issues and themes of social change and ideals related to it.

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to what Ghannoushi (2011) has pointed out, the liberation and voices of resistance is not limited only to Arab women but for other ethnic backgrounds as well. For example in Rojava the Kurdish women have been central in building the society and fighting against ISIS (Tank, 2017).



What unites the texts I have analyzed in this chapter is that they all try to bring up certain un-looked aspects of the so-called Arab Spring and challenge the grand narrative. Alhassen (2012) among others, notes that the events of the so-called Arab Spring were revolutionary in the way they called for new ways of envisioning human treatment, i.e. the calls for dignity, karama.

Hanafi (2012) sees that there is hope for the future and ways to learn for example on how to use the transnational ties and the weaknesses of the ruling regimes when they are faced with unseen opposition on a massive scale:

*The system also failed to silence the opposition, especially in the diasporic community. This offers a ray of hope to all those struggling for democratization-to learn how to use the regimes' weaknesses to produce change in the order. (p. 52.)*

Ghannoushi (2011) shares this view, when they say that the legacy of the revolutions is embedded onto the memory of the activist involved in the so-called Arab Spring, those who are the future leaders. As noted earlier in this chapter, Ghannoushi also sees that the revolutions are now part of the psyche of the Arab women and their voice is now louder than ever, all we need to do is to listen. This goes also for not only women but for all that are subaltern and fighting for social justice and change.

The last chapter of my thesis will focus on theoretical discussion on what it would mean if we made the move beyond the universalism and would acknowledge the fact that our world is still very much Eurocentric and based on orientalist stereotypes and other forms of othering where West is seen as superior to others. The last chapter draws all the previous chapters together and shows paths for future research where the West is not the only voice and only model.

## 6. Conclusions

*I will no longer use the term 'the West'. From now on it's WENA for Western Europe and North America. Pun possibly intended.. (KarlreMarks, 2016.)*

*I love how political analysts talk about 'the Arabs' as a unit, like all 400 millions of us sit around the village square and decide things (KarlreMarks, 2014.)* <sup>12</sup>

This chapter draws together the previous chapters and looks into the future, one key aspect of the critique could be said to be the Eurocentric notion of universality in the discussion of the so-called Arab Spring and as such it is not only the problem of this case but in a larger picture also. So, one way to move beyond the orientalist and Eurocentric views on universality in topics such as social change and movements is to start dismantling the notion of universality. One tool is to open up the possibility for transversalism, which can be helpful in the dismantling of post-colonialism and hegemony of the West.

If we look closely, the main message that can be drawn from the critique, especially when looked from a post-colonial theory perspective, is that there is a clear need for new narratives and for new ways of looking at how we, in the West, perceive the Arab region and in general our position and role on global scale in terms of political and social change.

Central to my formulation of this thesis was reading Hamid Dabashi's book "The Arab Spring – The end of Post-Colonialism" (2012), and I think it is important to note while Dabashi has named their book with the subtitle "end of Post-Colonialism", what I see he means by it and why the tools post-colonial theory and analysis have produced are still relevant in today's discussion. Dabashi talks a lot of the meaning of post-colonial mindset to both, colonizer and the colonized. Postcolonialism created a "myth of the white man", meaning the already talked division between the West and the rest (ibid, p. 75). I already mentioned in the previous chapter that I agree with Dabashi's statement that the so-called

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<sup>12</sup> Tweets by Karl Remarks, a satirical commentary page by Karl Sharro, that in many ways show the absurd nature of colonialism and the role of the West in creating and making stereotypes and assumptions.

Arab Spring has definitely challenged this, and it is something that needs to be challenged. To continue with Dabashi's analysis of the end of post-coloniality defined as "cessation of ideological production in colonial context and terms" (ibid., p. 139.), that I see to mean as a call to move beyond the postcolonial mindset as it is defined by the European colonial domination of the world. The end of end of post-coloniality does not mean that colonialism itself has ended or resistance it generates (ibid, p. 140). I see this as the most important notion as it means that while we need to move beyond postcolonialism and towards decolonialization, the power relations and inequality it has created are still relevant and something that needs to be challenged, the way we talk about them is the thing that needs to change. Dabashi also notes that the period of post-colonialism has been largely focused on the Eurocentricity of history and this needs to also change, end of post-coloniality means the return of history and looking back at it, with other viewpoint that is not centered on the West (ibid. p.144).

The complexity of the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" can't be explained, if only looked through the eurocentric and orientalist analysis produced by the grand narrative in the West. What is needed is a more open-minded analysis that takes account also the voices in the fringe, the subaltern. The key element of this thesis is the representations that are made of the Global South when discussing events such as the so-called "Arab Spring". These representations are not valid, if they do not include the voices of the subaltern and if they are not listened. In placing these voices to the center, the argument that rises is that the subaltern is not waiting for the recognition but if we want to achieve global justice, those voices need to be taken from the margins to the center.

## **6.1 What can be learned from the post-colonial critique?**

When looking at the critique I have highlighted in the analysis chapter, there is a clear lack of listening to the voices on the ground. As pointed out by AlMaghlouth et al (2015) much of the work is done in the West by western academic for western audiences. As Abaza (2013) shows the relationship between local informants and western academic is problematic and there is much work to be done in order for us to actually be able to say the analysis of the so-called Arab Spring would be inclusive. In my opinion the western

academics and media needs to take a step back and learn how to listen and act in solidarity with activist on the ground. I am not saying this is not done, but the scale of it needs to be much grander for us to be able to challenge the grand narrative.

By raising up the post-colonial voices and critique, I hope to have shown that there is great insight in those voices and that local voices can be equally important that those of academic elites in the west (maybe even more important). These voices must be recognized and give more room in media and in the academic discussion when we try to analyze and theorize social change in developing world and globally.

Lastly and most importantly the main message that echoes throughout the texts analyzed in the previous chapter, is that we need to seek tools to break the hegemony and universality of the West. The world has never been centered on West and it is a false image we have been learned to assume over many years. The ideals of modernity, democracy and many more are no longer if they ever truly were, a universal path to development. What needs to be done is to recognize the false universality of the West and move beyond it to a world that recognizes the multitude of different paths towards social justice, that are not centered on universal ideals but rather transversal solidarity.

## **6.2 Did the critique go far enough? Yes and No**

Before I move into the last part of my thesis, where I try to envision new paths for the future, I'll briefly reflect on the content of the critique I analyzed on the previous chapter.

For me, the answer to the question "Did the critique go far enough?" is two-fold. We can say that yes, the critique highlights important flaws in the analysis that the grand narrative has generated and, in my opinion, raises up important questions. These questions help us to look beyond the universalistic and Eurocentric grand narrative and give us important tool for the future and the move beyond post-colonialism.

Secondly, the critique presents us with array of subaltern voices that are missing in the grand narrative. The subaltern voices are the ones that should be at the center when

analysis events such as the so-called Arab Spring. These are the voices of those actors who risked their lives fighting for social justice within their society and voices that break the illusion of the hegemony of the West. In the case of the so-called Arab Spring, the people of Arab region showed that they are the makers of their own history and they do not need the West to tell them what to do.

Lastly, continuing from the previous sentence, the critique clearly shows us that the hegemony of the West is merely an illusion and that the West was never the actual center. While, the West might have been in the center for centuries trying to control the societal development, it never really had the role. As such, also we need to recognize the role of the West, in the past generating certain developments that have led to instability within the region and how in light of those actions it is mere hypocrisy to say that West is a role model for human rights and democracy.

What I see is lacking from the post-colonial critique I have analyzed is the next step, the move beyond post-colonialism. This might be due to the simple fact that they did not aim for that. As noted above they have a clear role in challenging the grand narrative and it might be the role of future researchers to use them as tools for future research. The alternatives might be present in the background and between the lines, but in my mind the future should be focused on those alternatives and making them coherent in order for us to be able to challenge the grand narrative. Post-colonialism has created a structure that hinders the transformation to decolonization. I see that in some parts it is true that if we only focus on the post-colonial society, we cannot vision a world without colonialism, but for me learning for the post-colonial critique is an important tool to make the move beyond post-colonialism to a world without colonialism. We are not yet there.

### **6.3 Moving beyond post-colonialism towards transversal solidarity**

For me, the clearest critique that the so-called Arab Spring has highlighted is the hegemony of the West and use of universalistic ideas and ideals. These universalistic ideas are connected to the Eurocentric and orientalist stereotypes and assumptions of

modernity and rationality. These are issues that have been theorized and discussed within the post-colonial studies for decades. Stemming from this, I see that global solidarity and calls for social justice needs to actively seek ways to confront this false ideal of universalism and break it.

Universalism has been critiqued by many and there are attempts to seek alternatives to it. More importantly, I feel, there are calls to break the eurocentrism in academia and in representations. For example, in the post-development theory, there are attempt such as the *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (2019), that collects together different alternative for development, neoliberal capitalism and modernity. In an article, Federico Demaria & Ashish Kothari (2017), the authors discuss the different alternatives, such as the *buen vivir* in Bolivia. They also show the importance of opening up the possibility of multiple world, to counter the idea of universalism, by quoting Escobar (in Demaria and Kothari (2017, p. 2596):

*The modern ontology presumes the existence of One World – a universe. This assumption is undermined by discussions in Transition Discourses, the buen vivir, and the rights of Nature. In emphasizing the profound relationality of all life, these newer tendencies show that there are indeed relational worldviews or ontologies for which the world is always multiple – a pluriverse. Relational ontologies are those that eschew the divisions between nature and culture, individual and community, and between us and them that are central to the modern ontology. Some of today’s struggles could be seen as reflecting the defence and activation of relational communities and worldviews ... and as such they could be read as ontological struggles; they refer to a different way of imagining life, to an other mode of existence. They point towards the pluriverse; in the successful formula of the Zapatista, the pluriverse can be described as ‘a world where many worlds fit’.*

I presented the Democratic Confederalism in the theory chapter as a model that has been experimented in the aftermath of the so-called “Arab Spring” in Rojava by the Kurdish people. It is a compelling experiment, that has countered the key elements of the critique I’ve presented in this thesis. The concept of “democratic modernity” breaks the history

of Eurocentric modernity and challenges the universalistic nature of it. The Rojava is also a great example of creating global solidarity as the open-letter by different actors, opposing the hegemony of the West and global capitalism, showing solidarity to Rojava after Turkey's appalling attack to Northern Syria (Allard et al., 2019).<sup>13</sup>

For me, the most compelling idea for breaking universalism is the idea of transversalism that is rooted in the Italian feminist groups. Yuval-Davis (1999) introduces the concept of transversal politics, where the difference between and within certain groups are recognized and the world is not experienced differently from different positions. Through discussion where these different experiences of the world are valued, there is a way to overcome the universalistic notions of life. The transversal politics was developed to counter the universalistic politics that make people in certain groups, in this case the Left, be seen as the same. For me the key notion of transversalism is that it takes into account differences and calls for the recognition of them. The differences are valued as a tool to understand the world better.

As I have argued previously, that in our world today, key problem still is the Eurocentric notions of modernity and universalism, that are imposed by West through coloniality and expansion of neoliberal capitalist globalization. The hegemony of the West was at the center of the critique I analyzed in the thesis. The main argument would then be that transformations of political and economic relations cannot (*or rather should not?*) anymore be explained by a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change.

What is needed for us to understand global justice movements more deeply is to critically look at how resistances to it form or rather the relationship between globalization and contestation. The contestations, all forms of resistances, do not happen on determined ways, they do not happen without the agency of those involved in them and lastly, they are not single-minded and without relations of power and politics. (Buckley, 2013.) In this thesis the aim is to firstly to find ways for global solidarities to have a deeper impact, by looking at the ways in which the transversalism described above is visible and in which ways the movements and their analysis is lacking dialogue and global ties. In light of the

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<sup>13</sup> Letter We stand in solidarity with Rojava, an example to the world, published in Guardian and signed by different members of social movements such as the Extinction Rebellion, Standing Rock and others, showing solidarity to Rojava.

analysis of this thesis the hegemony of the West in the power-relations in connected to the history of colonialism and imperialism that continue through coloniality.

The most pressing task is to give room from opposing ideas and for views that are marginalized. That is the most urgent task of humankind and it is a task for all of us, for I while I believe in some forms of institutions and structures, I am an even bigger believer in people. With expanding our minds and solidarity to those marginalized, we can start to think solutions outside the traditional realm of politics and create something new. Something better where politics is about justice and equality, not about wealth and individuality.

The so-called Arab Spring, for me marks the beginning of seeing that the power structures and systems western imperialism and colonialism have created are actually affecting the whole world today via the spread of neoliberal capitalist globalization i.e. we are starting to see that the unequal power relations between countries (and people) are also building up not only between societies but within them. What needs to be done is to recognize this, keeping in mind that there are people who are more suppressed and lacking certain possibilities i.e. the process to decolonization and breaking of universality needs to be done inclusively and not Eurocentrically. This also means that and read the critique of the so-called Arab Spring also to point out to this, global solidarity is not about giving a voice (in the age of modern technology marginalized are not waiting for it) it is about giving room for the voices of the marginalized and learning from them. More importantly, the thesis shows that with recognizing these voices there is hope. What rises up from the post-colonial critique is a counter-narrative to despair and a shining light of hope.

*But all that's needed  
is a bit of faith  
for your daylight to return,  
for you to be fertile and green again,  
for your fire to scorch  
the cowards' nests.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> Excerpt from a poem "Tartan S' shirt" by Galal El-Beairy. The poem was written by an imprisoned Egyptian poet Galal El-Beairy in Tora Prison on June 27, 2018. El-Beairy has been sentenced to prison for 'insulting the military' and 'spreading false news'. El-Beairy wrote lyrics for the singer Ramy Essam, who was a central figure in the Egyptian protests.



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